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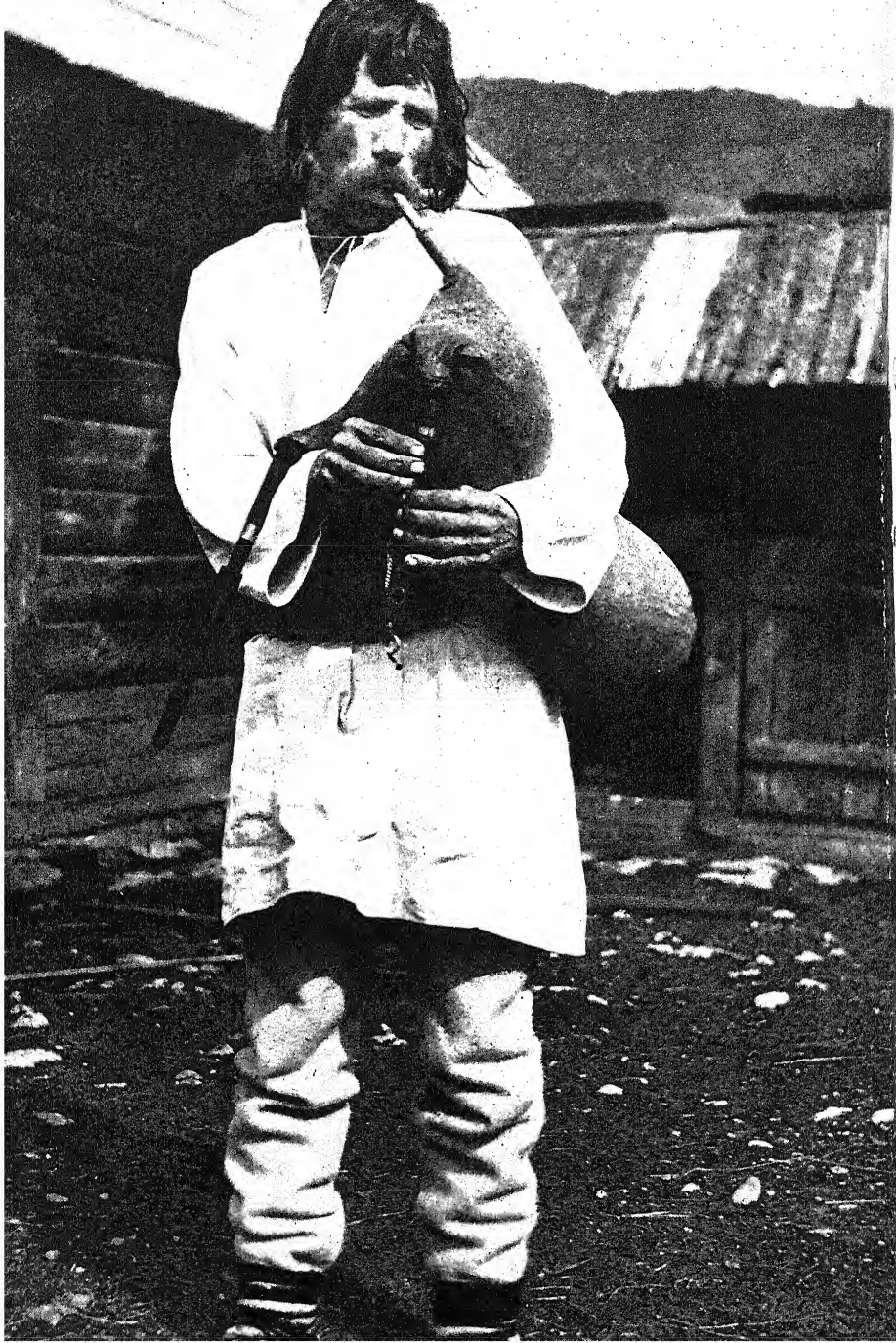
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DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

By the Same Author

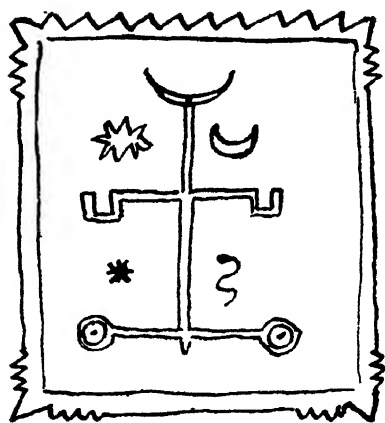
THE VOICE OF ATLAS



DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

by

PHILIP THORNTON



COLLINS

48 PALL MALL LONDON

1937

THIS BOOK IS SET IN FONTANA, A NEW TYPE
FACE DESIGNED FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF THE
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FOR MY FRIENDS
THE BELOE FAMILY OF CLIFTON
WITH THE AUTHOR'S GRATITUDE
AND AFFECTION.

"A goat also hath a beard."

Bulgarian Proverb.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

WHEN I went to search the Balkan States in 1935-36, for the material in this book, I made countless friends whose affection and help I shall always treasure.

They nearly all asked me to refrain from mentioning them by name in my story, so the reader must accept the names that I have invented.

I can but express my sincere appreciation for the co-operation and kindness that met me at every turn.

PHILIP THORNTON.

București, 1937.

PART I

MAY-JULY, 1935

that were to be seen there. But what finally fired my imagination was the writing on the cellophane covering of a dose of Aspirin that I begged of him. Thus it was written:

“Tabletat janë të pá-shoqe kundra të
ftohunit, rrufes athevet, dhembjevet
çë do lloji goutte etj.”

Languages have always had the same inexplicable fascination for me that fishing and stamp collecting have for others. The writing on the packet jumped up and seized my attention. I longed to hear and perhaps speak the sounds I saw printed on the stray scrap of paper. Of course, one is always prepared to be thought feeble-minded in admitting such ideas in public. But I have got used to this. It started when I tried to learn Russian at the age of twelve from a grammar bought for a precious fourpence at a Bristol bookshop.

By the time we landed at Tilbury I had learned most of the Albanian phonetics, and when we parted company he gave me enough material and information to start me off on a visit to Albania.

It is all very well to make plans for a trip abroad when you start off with the sole idea of travelling for amusement. Travel Agencies will map out your itinerary and arrange your accommodation, but they cannot arrange the sort of journey that I wanted to make. In Morocco I just wandered from one village or household to another, rarely knowing where I should be from one week to the next. A traveller

must have quite a number of introductions and a mass of information if he wants to get any real satisfaction from his enterprise. He must also have quite a tidy sum of money. I had very few funds, so I wrote a book¹ about the things I had seen in Morocco in the hope of earning some money for the Albanian adventure.

I had to wait for a whole year. My chance came quite suddenly when the B.B.C. commissioned me to give the eye-witness account of the Canonization at St. Peter's of the two English martyrs, Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher. I was left to make all the arrangements. My account was broadcast in the News on the Sunday evening.²

It was a curious experience to walk to the great Basilica at six-thirty in the morning, dressed as though for a court reception. Even more curious were those wild scenes outside the main doors, where thousands of shouting and struggling pilgrims fought—yes, literally fought—their way into the headquarters of the Roman Church. By the kindness of certain friends I had been given a diplomatic pass to a stand where I could see the whole ceremony in ease and comfort.

During the interval between the Canonization ceremonies and the Pontifical Mass, I left my seat and walked round behind the Papal Throne.

A few yards from where this most sacred ritual was being completed I discovered a crowded subterranean snack bar, complete with sandwiches and drinks. There stood the ex-King Alfonso and a host

¹ "The Voice of Atlas."

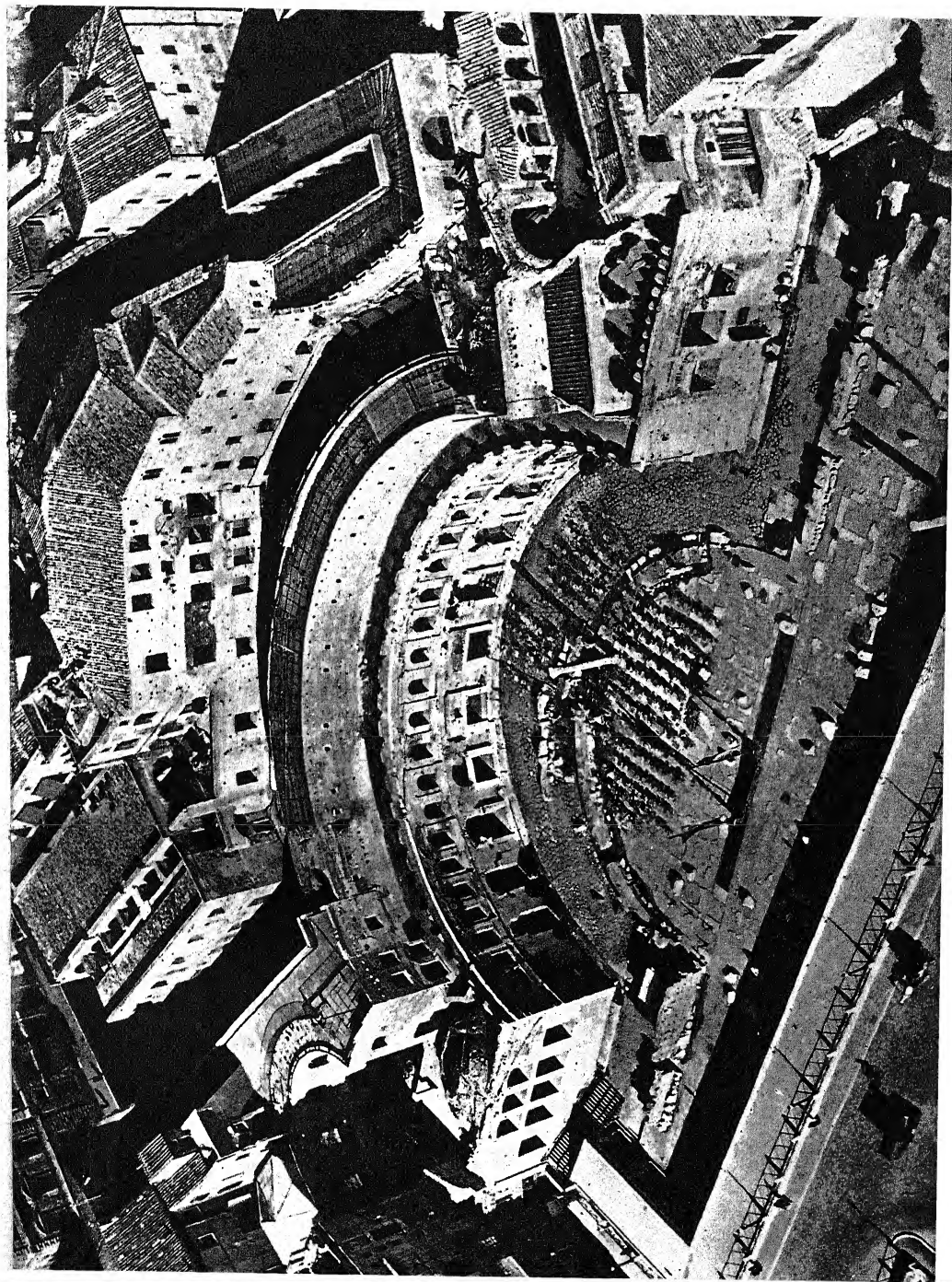
² 19th May, 1935.

of European notables, smoking and chatting away as they might be seen in the foyer of Covent Garden. The bar was rapidly filling with members of the Diplomatic Corps, many of whom made obeisance to Alfonso and his deaf and dumb son standing with him. Across the doorway to this happy scene there hung a thick leather curtain lined with red drugget. On the other side of this insulation the service continued. No sounds from within the snack bar penetrated the curtain.

Apparently they always have this refreshment available at the Canonizations, and even though it has shocked many people to whom I have told the tale, it struck me as being a most perfect example of the practical and successful materialism of the Roman Church. The Service lasts for at least six hours, and a quick drink in the interval has exactly the right stimulus on the Faithful.

How little did I realise as I stood there in the snack bar that only four days later I should be watching a fertility rite in a village north of Tirana, the Albanian capital. The atmosphere at this professedly pagan celebration was considerably quieter than at St. Peter's when the 16,000 pilgrims cheered the Pope until the very glass in the windows began to vibrate.

After the Canonization I booked a seat in the aeroplane that flew three times a week from Rome to Tirana. On the night before I left Rome, the dome of St. Peter's was illuminated with thousands of little oil flares. From the neighbouring hills it looked more wonderful than ever, glowing in the clear warm night.



The next morning I arrived in Tirana at noon. Although Rome was only five hours away by air I felt as though I had left Italy behind on the other side of the earth. There is nothing more exciting for me than to jump straight into a country from the air. It is just like riding on a modernised magic carpet.

The Airport at Tirana, Albania's capital, is rather primitive and is situated about a mile from the town. I was amused by the soldier on guard at the gates, who had been dozing in the warm sunlight. As the taxi drove out of the gates with a series of raucous blasts on the horn, the soldier leapt to attention; but he had forgotten to pick up his gun, which leant against the sentry box. Had I never been able to do more than visit the airport and return immediately, I feel that I could not have had a more vivid impression of Albania's outlook and attitude than the general appearance of that guard. His feet were starting through the toe-caps of his boots, like new potatoes pushing their way out of shallow soil. Seven patches adorned his tunic, and the seat of his trousers looked rather insecure where the seam had split. Perhaps Mussolini can't spare too much cash on the uniform of the Albanian privates.

The road to Tirana was as straight as a needle—a somewhat dusty needle with potholes every few yards. The hotel accommodation in the town is plentiful, but I think there are only two hotels I would dare to recommend to a prospective visitor. They are the best known in the town, one run by Italians from Bari and the other run by an Albanian. I visited five other hotels of lesser importance, and

found that the shabbier the exterior the finer the cuisine; though I confess that I would sooner have slept in the road than got into any of the beds I was offered.

The Albanian hotel previously mentioned suited me admirably, it was clean, quiet and very cheap, a single room with all taxes and tips costing but three shillings per diem.

The monetary system of Albania is an extraordinary puzzle. Many of the values that they refer to in the shops, and in the post office, have no existence except as figures of speech. For instance, according to the law of 12th July, 1925, the monetary unit is the Gold Franc valued at 100 Quindar. A gold coin worth 20 francs is reputed to exist and to weigh 6·34161 grams! Nobody I ever spoke to had ever seen one. Now the gold franc is subdivided into 5 coins called the Lek, and the lek divides into 20 Quindar. But although they sell you postage stamps with various amounts of quindar, nevertheless the coin does not exist. To make matters worse, they cut up the Lek into halves and quarters, but never refer to them as "half a Lek" but as "10 quindar" or "5 quindar." A man says the price of a pair of socks is 15 lek and 10 quindar, meaning 3 francs and $\frac{1}{2}$ a lek. No coins of 1 franc exist, but there are notes of 5, 10, etc. Any amount of francs over the sum of 20 is referred to as so many Naps (or Napoleons), therefore 10 francs can easily be "half a Nap."

Perhaps that is enough about the coinage—though I could introduce Para and Grosh, the two

friends of quindar! They are the arch-complicators of this abracadabra. One final word, the gold franc of Albania is pegged on the Swiss franc, a useful indicator to consult before visiting the country. The only country in Europe that ever appears to keep Albanian currency is Jugoslaviija. At Belgrad it is possible to buy notes. I have never seen any lek coinage outside Albania.

There is only one bank in Albania, The National—it has a few branches in the more important towns.

The peasants are taxed on everything they possess. Tithes are levied on farming land, and a head tax has to be paid on all cattle. A young government servant remarked to me one day at lunch, "Though one is perfectly aware in Albania of the many inconveniences of taxation, we the people are accustomed to it through the use of many years, and as a matter of fact do not particularly resent it." I wonder.

The general atmosphere of Tirana is one of dreamy quietness, and I think the only really ugly things in the town are the modern buildings. They have built their Whitehall on a piece of waste land in the centre of the town, placing the various departments in a horseshoe. On the right hand of the horseshoe is a large Parliament house, at first sight it looks like a Methodist Chapel transplanted from a London suburb. In the middle of this semicircle of buildings is the Press Bureau and Gendarmerie Headquarters, and on the opposite corner from the Parliament is what I imagined must

be the War Office. There is a wide sweep of ground in front of all these offices, and it is a great pity that a little time and money cannot be spared to clean it up somewhat.

When I was there last year, and stood looking at the forbidding array of new masonry, I could not help regretting the rubbish heaps and stagnant pools that decorate the open ground. When I met Zotni Sherko, the head of the Press Bureau, I mentioned this to him, as he asked me my opinion of Tirana. He just smiled and said, "Give us time—give us time, we have only just started."

The kindness of Zotni Sherko and his friends will always remain a treasured memory. True to the sacred laws of Albanian hospitality to a stranger, they did everything in their power to help me see the country. I was introduced to a certain Zotni Louis Filay, a Professor of Music in Tirana, and under his guidance made various excursions to the less respectable Kafejas, where we drank endless cups of coffee and listened to the various musicians. My presence with him in these low haunts appeared to act as a sort of insulation against any likelihood of Tirana gossip.

There is a very subtle and defined grading of unwritten social etiquette, which makes it absolutely *pamundshmi*¹ for Government servants or military officers to frequent the places patronised by the lower orders. Hence, when taking me to the entertainment at the Dervish Inn or the Rosebud Café, Zotni Louis Filay could always feel quite free

¹ "Not done."

and easy as we were there strictly on ethnological business! Foreigners provide excellent excuses in any country, for an occasional night out. I do not wish to give the impression that we frequented haunts of vice, on the contrary the atmosphere was always one of orderly respectability. The dancers wore so much clothing that nothing showed at all except their arms and feet, while their hair was neatly coifed up like a nun's when they were not performing.

The Rosebud Café was the nicest of all the places I visited. It was simply a long whitewashed room, with a counter at one end and the orchestra and musicians at the other end. The orchestra was excellent. I longed to dance to its fierce compelling rhythms, but knowing that such a display would shock and humiliate my noble escort I contented myself with drumming on the floor with my heels, and clapping the rhythms of the tambora players.

Albanian music is quite unlike anything I have heard during years of research in Oriental countries. It has admittedly been affected by four centuries of Turkish domination, but on really close examination does not conform to any of the rules set by the original scholars in Egypt. For it is from the Islamic music schools of the Medursa of Cairo, founded nearly a thousand years ago, that the Persians, Arabs and Turks have derived their original maqumat and tahkt (modes and rhythms). This great wave of musical culture has of course affected at one time or another the music of all the countries round the Mediterranean, Black, and

Ægean Seas. Nor did that influence stop there, for even in the extreme north of Rumania I have found well-defined traces of Turkish song and dance forms.

The chief characteristic of Albanian music is rhythmic "punch" and great simplicity of melody. I shall not forget my bewilderment at hearing for the first time rhythms that ran in eleven or thirteen beats to the bar. Sometimes in one's life there come sudden revelations of mysteries that have hitherto been unintelligible. I can think of no other way of explaining what happened when I found myself consciously understanding for the first time—though heaven knows I had had it drilled into me at the music schools at Fez and Marrakesh—the subtleties of the Broken Measure.

Anybody can say, after being taught Quadratic Equations or the Binomial Theorem, "I understand this—I can *do* these mysterious problems in abstract quantities"—but it is quite another matter to have an inner consciousness of what you are doing. Understanding has a vast connotation of attributes, and what I am driving at is simply this; that one can drift on perhaps for a whole life without ever having had an exact comprehension of anything. When I told some pupils that they could never expect to understand the laws of counterpoint until they had considered some of the elementary laws of Vibration, they tittered and nudged each other. I was clearly Cuckoo!

Some weeks later I persuaded a young Indian, who was an expert drummer, to give a demonstration

of rhythmic exercises on his instrument. He turned those sniggers into gasps of astonishment by his brilliant performance. Soon came my turn to smile when he set the class a few problems in counterpoint, and remarked when each student had submitted his or her mess of calculations, "In my country, such problems as you have evidently no ability to solve, are regarded as elementary exercises by the children in our music schools—but then, of course, we devote considerable time to contemplation of the Laws of Vibration."

One evening on a visit to the Rosebud Café, we met a young man who came up and greeted us very warmly, asking Filay to introduce him to me. His name was Paul Hajrija, and he had been educated in Constantinople at the American College. I rather think he took the wind out of Filay's sails by talking to me in fluent English about my visit, but after his first burst we switched back to French and all was well. Unlike most of the Balkan people who go away from home, and acquire both a new set of values and a western code of behaviour in a foreign school, Paul was a passionate lover of his country and its primeval customs. He had benefited by his education. He said it had taught him how to deal with foreigners in their own way, but it had not robbed him of his genuine appreciation of the life that was going on all around him in Albania.

Paul insisted that we should go with him in two days' time to the village where his ancestors had lived for many hundreds of years. They were

celebrating a great midsummer festival which I must not miss on any account. Filay urged me to go, but said that it was quite out of the question for him to find time to get away for the three days that would be necessary. He had the end of term examinations coming on in a week's time, and it was naturally impossible for him to leave his work. I was very sorry, because his expert analysis of the music and dances would have been invaluable.

At the hotel I explained what I was going to do, and asked them to look after my baggage till I returned. The manager was somewhat shocked at my idea of going off to mix with the peasants, but he had implicit faith in "What the English gentleman does cannot be wrong—he is so honest and kind to look at."

On the Friday morning at 5.30 Paul arrived at the hotel, with a weather-beaten car which he had borrowed for the trip. I put my kitbag behind a space between the mysterious sacks and parcels that littered the floor and seats. He had insisted in going off at that early hour because of the very uncertain nature of the road after we had left Kruja. As far as Kruja the surface was passable, but the dust lay in inches along the sides of the road. We passed a cutting where Paul said the Government intended to run a direct road to Tirana when they had enough funds for the enterprise. The scenery in places on the way to Kruja is very English, lovely stretches of meadowland full of wild flowers, and even hedges of blackthorn. There were also oaks

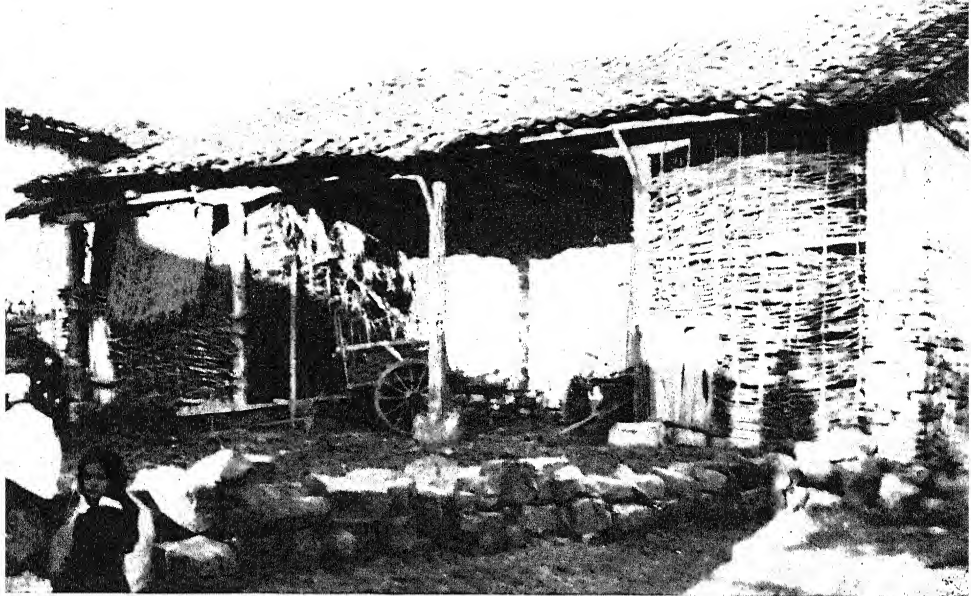
and ashes growing to a great size. But the peasants singing as they worked in the fields, and the distant lines of jagged blue and green mountains, were a forcible reminder that it was a very foreign country after all.

We travelled so slowly that we scarcely felt any advantage from the breeze that blew in through the open windscreen. Moreover, this current of air became steadily hotter and charged with stifling dust. Towards midday when the sun was directly overhead, I could stand it no longer and we stopped at a stream for a wash and a rest. A few miles farther on, perched on the side of the hill, was Kruja, looking very inviting in its setting of green gardens and trees.

George Castrioth of Kruja, better known as Skanderbeg the Brave, is the national hero of Albania to-day. His exploits of daring and skill are still chanted over by the musicians, who have sung the sagas since the middle of the fifteenth century. Skanderbeg's death in 1467 deprived the Albanians of their last real support in the endless struggle with Turkish imperialism. Some of the songs call this Robin Hood by a much grander title—Prince Alexander—in honourable reference to the original Alexander, whose campaigns extended all over the Ottoman Empire. Although vast numbers of Albanians went over to Islam, partly to avoid further persecution and partly to secure the economical advantages connected with their "conversion," there were many thousands who stubbornly refused to forsake the Christian faith.

The Turks only succeeded in completely dominating the open plains, and in its mountain fastness the flame of insurrection blazed on unchecked by threats or reprisals.

Indomitable independence and ferocious bravery are the most noticeable characteristics of the Albanian people as a whole. This is evident at every turn, even in the attitude of the Albanian public to the beggars that infest the towns like Elbasan and Tirana. How often have I watched some aged woman—only half human in drapings of verminous rags—sitting in the dust and wailing quietly for a few coins to buy food. She is given just enough to keep alive by the passers-by, who regard her as unsightly but inevitable. If I collected ten thousand pounds and attempted to found a home where these aged parasites could die in comfort, not only might I meet with the stonewall indifference from the better class Albanians but the probable boycott of the beggars themselves. A friend of mine actually tried out this experiment in Smyrna, after the evacuation of the Greeks had left behind scores of destitute women and children. After keeping open for a month he packed up and left the country, shaking the Turkish dust from off his well-meaning shoes. This attitude is very simple if unintelligible to a western mind. A beggar has as much right to his independence as a rich man. After all he has chosen to be a beggar, therefore he must suffer and die of neglect, but it would be a wicked crime to put him in a comfortable workhouse where he is deprived of his liberty. And that stands for all the Oriental



FATIMA EVADES THE CAMERA.

FRONT DOOR OF TOPTANI HOUSE SEEN FROM VERANDA.



countries, where I have pitied the diseased and apparently starving humanity that litter every town and city.

It is amazing that Christianity—either Roman or Orthodox—has survived in any measure of purity in spite of the perpetual interference of one invader after another. All sorts of curious semi-pagan beliefs and practices have found their way into the religious life of the peasants.

Paul had a friend in Kruja, at whose house he said we should be very welcome. The friend was a Moslem and his name was Xhafer Toptani. It took rather a long time to find the young man, who was busy buying some grain at the other end of the town. Paul went off with two little Toptani boys to find their elder brother who had recently become head of the family on the death of their father. They left me squatting on the great open veranda of the house, eating a slice of melon and watching the people in the street below. I felt very content and at home in these beautiful and friendly surroundings.

As I was wiping my face after the melon, a tiny child waddled out of one of the doorways that lead on to the balcony and came towards me, holding out an ancient rag doll. We talked in a curious monosyllabic language of our own, and in the end the bundle of clothes came and sat in my lap. I was rather intrigued with speculations as to whether it was a boy or a girl. The garments were suitable for either sex—long cotton trousers and a loose blouse girt in at the waist with several yards of

pink silk sashing. Its head was clipped close to the skull like a small convict.

Voices from below made known that Paul and Xhafer had returned. The bundle sat up and listened. "Baba—Baba," it said, and pointed to the doorway. A moment later Xhafer appeared and was introduced to me. "Baba—Baba," repeated the bundle excitedly and jumped up and down.

"My daughter Fatima," said Xhafer, and picked up the child.

"She is a strong and clever woman," I answered.

"She is a child of good luck, being a twin and a 'first born' before her brother." Fatima was sent indoors with a servant, and we sat and chatted about England. Xhafer spoke very little French and no English, but he was a man of quick intelligence, and plied me with all sorts of questions, until a servant announced our meal was ready. Contrary to my expectations, we ate with knives and forks, even though we sat on thick bolsters round a low table. Moslem law is not very strictly followed in Albania. In Fez or Marrekesh, in the houses of the most modern and up-to-date Moslems, I have always eaten with my hands, even in the full glare of electric lights, with the radio blaring away in a corner.

The pilaf of mutton was excellent, so also was the thick honey cake that followed it. Paul decided that we would rest for an hour at least before continuing, and asked if I would like to go to sleep, so Xhafer called for three quilts to be brought in. I kicked off my sandals and rolled up in the quilt

like the others. Albanian hospitality is a very sacred thing. A stranger who cannot even say "please" or "yes" in the foreign tongue is sure of a welcome in the very poorest house. No disgrace is more lowering than finding the larder too bare to offer a stranger a crust or a piece of cheese. Stingy characters are treated with complete contempt. An offer to pay for entertainment is an insult to the host—he only wants your contented thanks and some fresh gossip from the outside world. In the English mind there is always the fixed idea of paying for what you get. More often than not, if you call at a house and ask for a glass of water or a piece of bread and cheese somebody phones to the police and says a tramp has been molesting them. To such respectable householders all travellers are vagrants.

We left the Toptani household at three in the afternoon, and drove slowly along a road that became steadily less and less worthy of the name. Boulders weighing several tons lay across the track and necessitated the most careful handling of the car. We were only to go another fifteen miles along the side of the mountain to the village where the Festival was to take place. Fortunately the gradient was not severe, otherwise I am certain that the car would have stranded us half-way. The gears all seized periodically, and had to be tinkered about with a wooden mallet. If my knowledge of interior car workings is small, Paul's was infinitesimal. His golden rule, should anything appear to go wrong with the engine, was a couple of stout bangs on the gear-box with the mallet. This treatment, he

explained, was the most efficacious and rapid way he knew of shifting an obstruction in the gear wheels. The odd thing was that he was always successful in calming the periodic shrieks and grindings when the car refused to move. We made painful progress, but found many willing hands among the other travellers who were heading towards Shejtigjon¹ for the party. Festival is perhaps the wrong word, since it was much nearer an English Bank Holiday than a religious function.

We met mothers and fathers with their children, sometimes complete families with aunts and uncles all walking up to the village. Most of them would be staying with friends or relations in Shejtigjon, a few would camp out in little tents or bothies made of hurdles and sods of grass. It was rather like a picture of the retreat of the children of Israel through Egypt in a book I treasured as a child. We in the car represented the Ark of the Covenant, behind us marched an ever-increasing procession of chattering Albanians—they were the Chosen Seed.

The car went so slowly that I got out and walked by the side. It was a cool, clear evening and the scent of wild sage hung in the air like a savoury incense. A voice started singing in the procession, a woman's voice, high and thin like a reed flute. Others joined in, and after a few minutes the whole body of men and women were singing a type of antiphonal hymn that rose and fell with metrical regularity.

"What is it they are singing?" I asked Paul.

¹ Shejti—Saint, Gjon—John, approximate pronunciation—Shunj-djun.

"I don't know how to describe it to you—it is the oldest of our tribal songs, coming perhaps from the days before we were Christians."

"Yes, but what about?"

He drove on for some yards in silence, and then in a voice that betrayed a fear that I might be scornfully amused, answered, "They sing about a certain giant called Mithrosh who lived in a cave at the top of Daiti mountain. Every year he slew an ox, and made certain magic over its dead body. This was so that the crops and herds would grow well, and the harvest be a happy one. Many of the peasants still believe that Mithrosh lives on the mountain, and at the 'four corners of the year' they light great fires and dance round them."

Instead of laughing I became more and more inquisitive, plying Paul with questions that he no doubt found rather boring. Here was one of the clearest survivals of the Mithras cult mixed up with Zoroastrian practices. I had met the same curious mixture of ideas when roaming about the Atlas Mountains, and it struck me immediately that these people, locked away in Albania's seclusion, bore more than a superficial resemblance to the Berbers. Perhaps I should stumble on some new truth that the outside world would know nothing about? Paul agreed that almost anything was possible in a country so remote that even the inhabitants of one village find difficulty in speaking the dialect of their neighbours only fifteen miles away.

We found Shejtigjon, hidden in a great cleft between two slopes of the mountain. It was in an

impregnable position, perched on a ledge with a precipice running round three sides. The car had to be left in a shed outside the courtyard of Great Uncle Djelib's house, as we could not manœuvre it through the gate. A few little boys came out and had a good stare at us, but the villagers were too busy to bother about new arrivals.

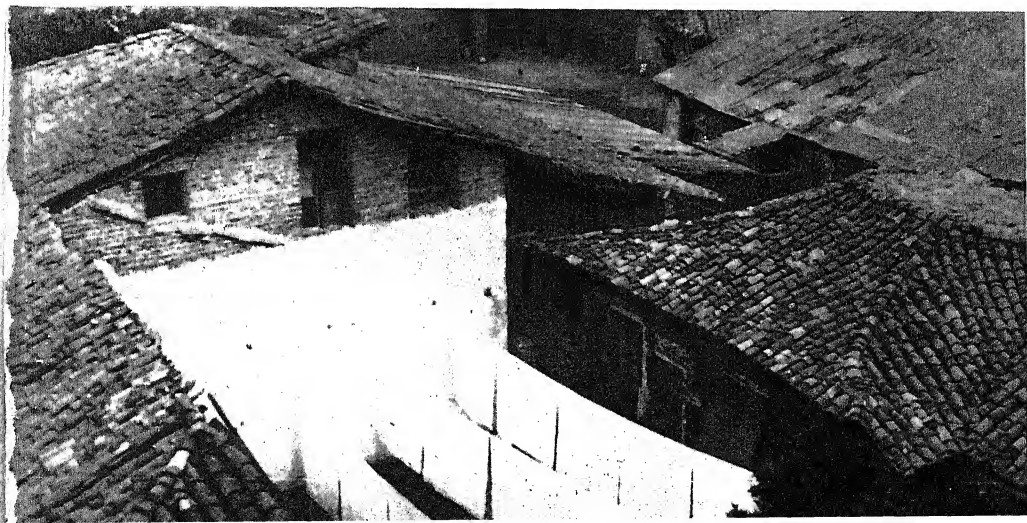
The house was a two-storied building that rambled over a surprising space of ground. It had a neat flower garden planted with roses in front, and was surrounded by an unplastered wall that would have done credit to Pentonville Prison. I had been told that only four years back, one of the married daughters of the house, who was staying with Paul's great uncle during the absence of her husband, had been the recipient of a hideous present—her husband's head in a basket of fruit. He had been killed to wipe out a blood debt. She lived now in honourable widowhood, and acted as housekeeper to her old father. So the high walls and their fortress-like construction were fully justified by the uncertainty of life in that area.

We unpacked the innumerable bundles and sacks of presents, and carried them to the front door, which as usual was on the top floor, up a flight of wooden steps. The ground floor was evidently used for store rooms and servants' quarters. I noticed that the house was built in two complete sections, the lower half of stone and the top half of lath and plaster strengthened with woodwork, like a Swiss chalet, only far less ornate. Our arrival was announced to the Father of the House, Great Uncle Djelib who was



"THE CAR HAD TO BE LEFT IN A SHED."

BACK-YARD OF GREAT UNCLE DJELIB'S HOUSE.



DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

eighty-seven years old but looked little more than seventy.

He came out to greet us on the balcony. Paul explained who I was and why I was there, and he seemed delighted to see me, though neither of us could make more than a few sounds that were



GREAT UNCLE DJELIB

mutually intelligible, for he spoke with a Gheg dialect that completely defeated me. While we stood there talking and showing the things we had brought from Tirana, four men walked in and greeted Paul. They were his uncles and lived with the old man, who had a family of ten children and forty-two grandchildren. I never discovered how many of these relations lived under the same roof,

but when we sat down to eat, I counted fourteen adults besides the innumerable children who wandered in and out of the room fetching dishes.

I felt that for the moment I had become a member of that vast family, for they accepted me quite naturally without any fuss or comment. Of course, there were hundreds of questions to be answered, that was only natural, for the Albanians are the politest people in Europe, and their cross-examination of visitors is a mark of their great pleasure at meeting them.

Most of these questions had to pass through Paul's interpretation, so also had my answers. But what did that matter? The essential point was to show me by their inquisitiveness that I was a guest of esteemed news value. Most English people hate being asked questions, in fact, our tribal customs do not regard such treatment as correct, but you have to abandon all such conventions if you want to move about in Albania as a friend among friends.

After the meal I went to get my notebooks and change into a pair of thick woollen long hose which Paul had lent me for the dance. My bedroom had bare whitewashed walls. A wooden stool and a bed were its only furnishings, and the bedding consisted of thick ginger and purple rugs laid on a string mattress stuffed with heather. As I got into the drawers and belted them round me I could hear the distant sound of drumming, and a whine of bagpipes. The dancing had evidently started, and I found myself already so impatient to be off, there was barely time to look out the various books and

pencils that I wanted. In fact, when I arrived downstairs where the party was assembling to go up to the dance, the men took one look at me and then even their Albanian etiquette could not restrain their laughter.

"What has happened?" I stammered, and looked stupidly at Paul.

"You have put on those *pantallona* the wrong way round!"

So I had to retreat and put the mysterious garments in the way they were designed to be worn.

Although this was the longest day of the year, it was quite dark at nine, and they had lit lanterns to guide us on the way to the dancing ground which was some distance outside the village on a flat stretch of earth. Nearly the whole population was there to watch the ritual dance of the four seasons that had just started when we arrived. A small fire of aromatic wood burned in the middle of the pitch and round it moved two circles, one of twelve men and the other of twelve women. They danced in contrary directions, using completely different steps. To one who had never before seen such movements the effect was as fine as any ballet, while the atmosphere, so far from being remotely theatrical, was charged with a magic quality that classical dancing has never produced. Here before my eyes was a ritual, perhaps of primeval origin, where the twelve months of the year danced round the eternal sun or the source of all life. Insomuch as life is perpetuated by the fusion of the sexes, so each month was represented by a man and a woman. Whether

the dancers had the slightest consciousness of the philosophical truth they were illustrating, I cared not. What amazed me was the sincerity and gravity with which they circled round that fire, to the accompaniment of a drum that played relentlessly like a time signal. Apart from the drum and the quiet footsteps of the dancers there was a complete silence.

Paul leant over to me, and whispered, "Now watch them closely, they are going to portray the four seasons, starting with winter, when they come to midsummer you will see something quite unique."

The tempo changed to a slow stately pace, and the men who had been dancing nearest the fire broke formation and filtered through the women's circle, thus reversing their original positions. The woman danced slowly round bowing low to the flames as the men stood still like frozen water. This represented the inactivity of man, and the busy cares of the women who have to keep the house through the hard months of winter.

Next followed spring, where the men moved closer to the fire and followed the woman's footsteps at half-speed. But suddenly without any warning the whole assembly, who evidently knew their exact moment from the development of the dance, shouted and clapped three times, "Ai—Ai—Ai—Atush—ga." The noise was like a broadside from a battleship. Simultaneously with that shout the two circles became one. It happened so quickly that I have no idea how the women managed to break their circle and join up alternatively with the men.

The drummer started to work them into a faster pace and the crowd sang that very same antiphonal hymn I had heard during the afternoon. Like ripples on the surface of a sheet of water the circle was now contracting and expanding each time the dancers drew nearer the fire. I then saw what was going to happen; in a few more circuits they would close in so close to the fire that their feet would be in the flames. Other people saw this too, it was obvious from their expressions of suspense as they watched and sang with increasing fervour. Faster and more furious twirled those dancing "months," and at length with another great shout the whole band leapt into the fire and stamped it out in an instant. The sun had been blotted out, the winter had come again. The dance was done.

"That was what I wanted you to see," said Paul. But I was still too amazed to speak when he asked me what I thought of it. "This is, without doubt, a survival of a Zoroastrian cult that must have flourished here in the Kingdom of Epirus long before the days of Mithras," he continued.

"Yes, I'm convinced of it. But how astounding to find them calling out those words, 'Atush-ga.' Does it mean anything in Albanian?" I said.

"No. I think it is a magic formula, what do you think it can mean?"

"Then it is nothing less than the survival of the actual words used by the Zoroastrians for their fire fields; the only difference is that they said 'Atashga' instead of this survived form of Atush."

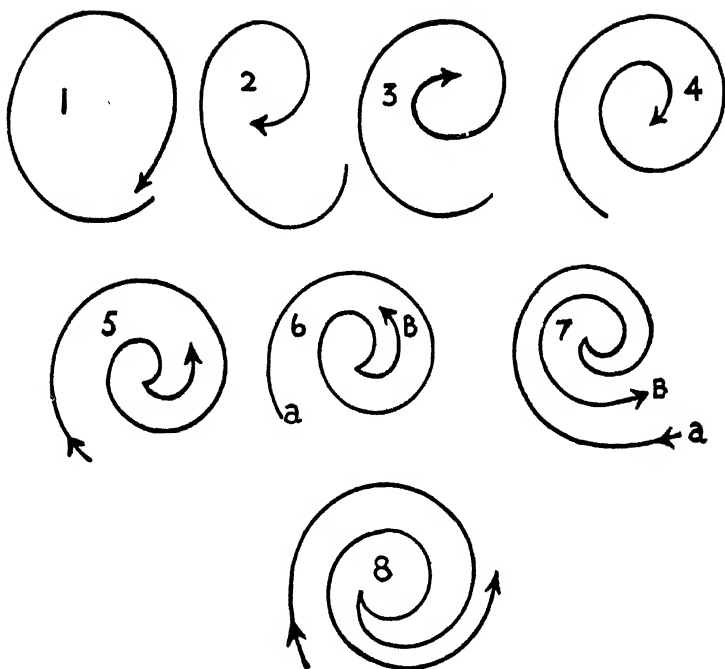
The crowd now started general dancing as soon

as the piper and drummer had taken up their stand. I watched them join up in a long line led by a little monkey-like man. He set the steps and shouted to the children to get out of his way. The line became a broken circle and moved off in a clockwise direction, the leader who manœuvres his end so that with each successive circuit he leads them closer and closer to the centre. Rather like the movement of a hair spring in a watch that coils and uncoils. I remembered the dance patterns of the Malekulan islanders that John Layard, the anthropologist, had shown me; in many particulars they were identical with the dance I was watching. These Albanians were treading the serpent maze that winds itself into a seemingly insoluble state of confusion and then calmly unwinds backwards from the centre—a solution that you least expect. The following diagrams will explain the stages of the maze formation.

The first four diagrams show how the broken circle has grown into the spiral of Nos. 4 and 5. Naturally, when the leader has wound up his "snake" as far as this, he cannot go any farther, so he doubles back on his tracks, leading the rest of the dancers behind him. By the time you have arrived at Nos. 7 and 8 there are two distinct movements at work in the dance pattern. One finding its way inwards (*a*) and the other being led outwards (*b*) towards the outside. The effect is exactly like watching a cobra awake from sleep, and uncoil its body from the innermost ring where the tail lies.

The significance of this particular type of dancing,

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE



known as the Maze Formula, is obvious when one considers that many primitive races believe that the soul on leaving the body at death is required to find its way through a labyrinth, before entering the final Rest. Therefore, in their dancing they sub-consciously prepare for that great test, knowing that if they cannot find their way out of a dance puzzle, they will have small chance of solving the Eternal Maze that awaits them at the end.

Life is symbolised as a dance pattern, and just as when the man who breaks that pattern gets lost in the ensuing muddle of arms and legs, so also will his soul be swallowed up in the vastness of the

Eternal Maze, unless Life has shown him the solution.

Regardless of political and geographical barriers, the chain dance links up all the Balkan countries. The steps differ according to national habits and tastes, but it is as basic in their social life, as watching football to the English. From peasant to museum director, from king to soldier, they all dance with an intensity of enjoyment that is inspiring to watch.

One of the maddest things that Mustapha Kemal has done in modern Turkey is his fanatical suppression of the peasants' folk dancing. While people are enjoying themselves dancing out their symbolical patterns they are happy and contented. Take away that right and substitute Modern Jazz and ballroom antics, and sooner or later the nation heads into disgruntled chaos.

In the dancing and music of the Balkan races are hidden their innermost secrets.

Civilisation has paralysed Western Europe with Peace Conferences, Disarmament Questions, Gas Defences and other farces, but has not yet put its fingers round the dancing feet of the peasant in these less "developed" countries.

He may be living in an obsolete uneconomic manner, the intellectuals at Berlin may call him a puppet controlled by circumstance, but the peasant has still kept a freedom of heart more precious than the dubious gifts of the Western World.

We went back to the house shortly before midnight—for the dancing had to stop before the Sabbath—and went straight to bed.



"HE WHO DANCES WITH THEM SHALL LEARN."

Wrapped in the ginger-coloured blankets, I thought of Stanley Holloway's famous story about young Albert Ramsbottom, and how he tickled the ear of Wallace, a lion at Blackpool Zoo. I must have looked very much like Wallace lying on his bed of dried ferns. Repeating the story over to myself, I fell asleep.

I woke to the sound of shouting and cow-bells ringing, and got up to look out of the window. In the street a herd of cattle were being driven up to graze on the green slopes behind the village. Whilst I stood there gazing at the mist rising from the distant peaks like pale wraiths, a couple of thuds on the door announced the arrival of two women who carried an enormous wooden tub which they placed in the middle of the floor.

This was done with considerable solemnity and in complete silence, for it would have been immodest for them to have either looked at or spoken to me. Later they returned with hot and cold water in earthenware jars. When I came to pour the water into the tub, I found it an effort to lift the jars off the ground, yet these women had handled them with such ease and grace one would have imagined the weight was a mere trifle.

I spent the morning walking about the village alone. Paul had a family conclave to attend so we did not meet till midday meal, which was eaten by over fifty people. We sat in the garden at long tables.

Each table was graded in age so that the youngest people sat in the middle with their elders at the ends. Everybody helped everybody else, with the result that

when we had finished I felt that I should never be able to walk about again. But the solution of the difficulty was quite simple. I just followed the example of the others who stretched themselves on the ground and quietly dropped off to sleep for an hour.

From about four o'clock until late that night the garden was turned into a sort of Free House for any one who cared to avail themselves of the hospitality of Great Uncle Djelib and his family. We danced, we sang and we told stories. There is not much scope in England for story-telling in public, because we live at such a speed that there is never time to finish a long one—lasting, say, half an hour. By that time your audience has remembered that it has to fit in two more parties that same evening. But in Albania, where time ambles at a gentle pace, a good storyteller is an asset to any social gathering. Nearly all the tales I heard that evening were well known to the audience who loved to hear them over and over again, if well told with plenty of expression. Paul translated them sentence by sentence and I wrote a few down.

The best reception was accorded to a perfectly true account of how Great Uncle Djeleb's father had detected a thief and punished him accordingly. The old man himself told the story, for he had been present as a boy when the trial took place.

"I was a young man living in my father's house, when these events that I shall relate took place. As you know, of course, the house was burned to the ground shortly after my father died.

“Two men who worked for our family as herdsmen had a violent quarrel about a bag of gold that had been lost. The first, whose name was Akim, accused the second called Sotir of having stolen his bag of gold after having consented to look after it while Akim was absent from home. My father had sent this man on business to Kula a Matës which is a very long way through the mountains and several weeks passed before he returned to ask Sotir for the gold.

“But the wicked Sotir denied all knowledge of this trust and laughed at Akim who implored him not to jest, but to give back the bag immediately. Now when Akim threatened to fight Sotir for the money, and punish him, all the sons of Sotir came and mocked at the wretched man, saying, ‘Thou fool, our father has no gold of thine! Get out of the house before we give thee a thrashing.’

“So in fear of his life Akim left their house, but vowed he would get even with them, for had not Sotir sworn a solemn oath under the great sycamore tree that grows on the left-hand side of the road to Lesh? He went, therefore, to consult my father, and accused Sotir to him, saying, ‘On the first day of Brytmi i Dyte I went at your bidding to Kula a Matës. Is that not so?’

“And my father answered, ‘It is so—but what of it?’

“‘I entrusted a bag of gold to my fellow-worker Sotir, that he might guard it in my absence from home; now he refuses to give it back to me.’ ‘And you have witnesses that this was so?’ asked my father.

‘None, lord,’ said the foolish man; ‘but we swore an oath under the great sycamore that stands on the left hand of the road to Lesh.’ ‘It is a grave accusation that you make against Sotir, and you shall go and tell him to be here to-morrow for trial. If you are lying to me, I shall blind you in one eye, but if you speak the truth, Sotir shall be equally punished.’

“‘So be it,’ agreed Akim and went to tell his family of my father’s decision.” Here the old man picked up a glass of wine to moisten his throat. Though they knew exactly what was coming next his audience sat in a silence of suspense that was quite amazing. Great Uncle Djelib wiped his moustache on an embroidered handkerchief and continued.

“Now the next day the whole village turned out to see my father give judgment. The two men, Sotir and Akim, came forward and each told his story. Sotir said, ‘But, my lord and master, this Akim is trying to extort gold from me. He never had any in his life, how then could he entrust a bag of it to me?’ Akim replied to these words, ‘Hear me, my lord, when I say that Sotir swore an oath with me under the great sycamore tree that stands on the left-hand side of the road to Lesh.’ ‘But that is a lie, there is no such sycamore tree, Akim is, as ever, a deceitful dog,’ shouted Sotir in great anger. ‘We will see whether he lies,’ said my father, who turned to Akim, and said, ‘Akim, go to that tree and pick me a twig, for I wish to see if the leaves have fallen yet.’

“For it was October, and my father was one who

could read omens like as a man might read a book. Akim departed and was gone for two hours when my father turned to Sotir and said, 'What can have happened to Akim—can he have lost his way, for he should be back ere now.' Before Sotir had thought of what he was about to say, he replied to my father, 'Akim will be back in half an hour, he walks quickly.' 'Seize him,' said my father, 'for he must know where the tree is if he can tell when Akim will be back.'

"When Akim returned with the twig, Sotir had confessed his crime and explained where he had buried the gold in a box.

"'What shall be done with this snake?' said my father to Akim 'Let him be buried and hidden from his fellow men, as he hid my gold,' replied Akim. And it was done as he required."

A grunt of approval broke the silence when he had finished.

"Did they really bury him alive," I asked Paul.

"Yes, of course, it was the penalty for his dishonesty. Quite a light penalty when you think of what degradation would have fallen on Akim's family if the case had been proved against him."

Honesty and personal integrity are valued almost as much as the laws of hospitality in this country where a man's word is his bond. Sotir had nearly betrayed Akim and his entire family to a dog's life of distrust, so the horrible penalty can be understood.

Later in the evening they asked me to tell them an English story. I thought hectically for something that would go down well, and after a brief con-

sultation with Paul we agreed that he could translate each sentence as I went along. My choice was "The Berkshire Tragedy," for it has that element of gruesome reality that would appeal to the audience, particularly when the miller pushes his daughter back into the stream to drown, after he has taken the ten guineas that she offered him to fish her out. I saw their eyes glint with approval when we got to the part where the Coroner and Justice arrive for the inquest, and decide to send the wicked miller up for trial on a charge of wilful murder.

"They hanged the old miller upon his own hook,
 Hey down bow down,
 For pushing his daughter into the brook,
 And I will be true to my love if my love will be
 true unto me!"

They were delighted with the fate of the wicked miller, and one old man remarked with satisfaction that he was pleased to hear that if a man murders his daughter in my country the public avenge her death in a proper manner. He wanted to know whether they merely hanged the miller by pushing the hook through his neck, or did I think they did it as the Turks used to hang the Christians, by pushing the hook up underneath the ribs, so that death took several hours. I was reluctantly forced to say that I thought they only strung him up with rope. Somehow, such humane treatment took the edge off their keen enjoyment of the miller's fate.

The evening slipped past almost unheeded as we

laughed at each other's jokes and tried to sing each other's songs. When it became almost time to break up the party a last dance was suggested. Hand in hand we moved round the mulberry trees in the garden, singing as we danced a quiet and solemn measure. As I looked at that chain of now quiet and solemn men, I wondered if I should ever find in all my wanderings friends more noble or endearing.

"You will come back again, Zotni Philip?" they asked when we parted at the door, and I promised that if ever I found myself within the boundaries of the Daiti mountains, I would assuredly visit Shejtigjon.

The next day we were back in Tirana. I found a pile of letters waiting to be read and answered. These are always the first signs of your return to civilisation. At the bottom of the pile was an enigmatic note written by the valet de chambre, saying that I was to call on the "Institut Antimalarik" where there would be news for me. I put on a clean shirt, brushed my hair and went off to find the Rockefeller Institute.

CHAPTER TWO

IT was no easy place to find. Every one knew perfectly well where it was—oh, yes—but as for giving me coherent directions for getting there, that was more difficult.

Nor were matters made any easier by the fact that when at last I arrived at the door I could make nobody hear, for the house was set back from the street and surrounded by a high wall. But after making a careful survey of the door I found a bell stuck high up on the lintel, so that the children could not play with it.

A young man came out and said that he was sorry that he had not at first heard me but would I come in. "Mr. Wilson is in the laboratory."

He led me across a small garden planted with roses, to the laboratory that was attached to the side of the main buildings. David Wilson had received a message from a mutual friend and had been asked to look me up if I arrived in Tirana. I watched him working with his Albanian assistant. They were taking mosquitoes out of a little gauze cage and putting them into test-tubes for further examination. Any one of those buzzing creatures could have given me a dose of malaria if it wanted to, for they had been caught in cow byres and sheds standing on the low-lying country round the marshes at Lesh. Wilson was going on an expedition to these and

other marshes on the next day, and after describing the place as the most malarious spot in the kingdom, he asked me if I would like to go "just for the experience."

Naturally, I decided to go, for such an opportunity of seeing fever-fighting at first hand does not come the way of most casual visitors. "We should sleep under canvas one night at the edge of the swamp—you won't mind that, will you?" he said.

"No, I shan't mind if the mosquitoes don't make themselves obtrusive," I reassured him.

So it was arranged that I was to meet them the following morning at six. I packed the minimum of luggage, because they had to carry two tents, mattresses, blankets, cooking utensils and a vast quantity of necessary apparatus for the research work. From his description of the work I went back to the hotel with an impression that it was just a glorious adventure—with a capital G and a capital A. Some Englishmen who do really dangerous things have such a capacity for laughing at the peril of their work that they often convince you it is all part of a game.

The car was only half-loaded when I arrived the next morning, but even at that stage there seemed no more room. It was packed so tightly that the back seats were filled right up to the roof, yet they still went on piling up more bundles on the carrier and at each side of the bonnet. When we got in the load must have been equivalent to eight men at least, but they assured me that this was nothing to crow about. "You know, we are not really loaded to

capacity," remarked Wilson as he let in the clutch and drove off.

The first halt was a puncture. The assistant, whose name I discovered to be Peter, was an expert mechanic. We were soon off again along the same road that I had covered with Paul. Kruja was hidden by the mist when we reached the point where I expected to see the familiar view of the Daiti gap.

I told Peter where I had been the day before. He was rather shocked. Being a Tosk from the south, he looked on the Ghegs as ruffians and murderers, but I rather suspect that his disdain was tinged with fear.

After following the road for another hour we arrived at the first marsh that was on the schedule. The car was parked on a hill overlooking the green expanse of reeds. I helped to unpack the curious beehive arrangement which held the thermometer. There was also a pile of stakes and a basket of tools that had to be carried over a quarter of a mile across the bog before we reached the water's edge. They said that the first job was to fix up the beehive on its platform so that the thermometer dipped down into the water.

The sun had already become blazing hot, so I took off my shirt and trousers and put on a pair of pyjamas. Meanwhile, the other two waded out into the long reeds and were lost from view. I carried down loads of impedimenta and tried to forget the flies and midges that filled the air.

They took over an hour to fix the beehive thing, working on a soft oozy bottom and standing up to their thighs in water.

The swamp was full of leeches. Foul, creeping things that ranged in size from a large mouse to half a kidney bean, and darted about on the surface of the water. Nothing could keep them out of your rubber boots once they had started to climb up the leg. One had wormed a way into the heel of my sock and had started sucking the blood that oozed from a series of minute holes. A great wave of revulsion and fury overcame me as I slashed the body in half with a jack-knife, for no amount of pulling would make it release the suction. I found three big ones at work on the calf of the other leg. Leech bites are not painful at the moment, but bleed and itch for hours after the animals have been detached. In Morocco I had learned of a rough but effective way of stopping the bleeding, by cauterising the wounds with a lighted match. The Berbers use salt water to make them drop off.

I felt very ashamed of the fuss I had made, for when Wilson and Peter came squelching their way out of the marsh and emptied the water from their boots, their arms and legs were literally one mass of running bites. I lit a candle and burned off the leeches that refused to give way to the knife, and then strapped their legs up with lengths of cotton bandaging that I had in my bag.

"We do not generally have such expert attentions," remarked Wilson mildly, and wiped the blood from his hands. "One gets so used to the leeches, you know—of course they are rather trying if they manage to get inside your shirt and bite the abdomen."

After a brief rest they went back into the swamp with boxes for collecting specimens of mosquito larva and eggs. I sat in the car and watched their heads bobbing about in the rushes that grew in places to such a height that they were often completely hidden as they moved about in the water.

The discomfort of the work they were doing must have been appalling. Attacked by leeches in the water and by midges and flies in the air, they waded about in that foetid green water fighting a battle against the united forces of malaria and the swamp. I was profoundly impressed with my own lack of courage. For it was an ordeal that I could not have faced with a quarter of their equanimity, and yet they seemed to enjoy the work. Unseen and almost unknown to the outside world, men such as these carry on a ceaseless war against disease. Their only decorations are scars and bites, yet they feel amply rewarded by the results of their selfless work.

As I sat there fanning myself with a sheet of newspaper, wondering how long it would be before we could move off and find some drinking water, I saw two men coming down the hill towards the car. They were carrying something tied to a pole. In the distance it looked like a crude hammock. When they drew nearer I could see that something alive was tied up in the bundle, and I got out of the car and walked towards them.

"*Tungjatjeta Zotni Doctor*," they said when we met.

"*Tungjatjeta njerezit*," I replied, and pointing to the pole asked what they were carrying.

"A child," they answered, with a tone of resigned

despair and started to unpack part of their precious load. To the peasant, every foreigner is a doctor, and they were quite convinced that seeing me with the well-known Anti-Malaria Unit I must be able to help them. The child was obviously dying. It was a boy of about eight years and his father and uncle had, in desperation, carried him over two miles in hope that we might do something for them. I pulled the frail emaciated body out of the blankets and looked closely at the drawn and haggard face.

"How long has he been ill?"

"Four days, *zotni*."

"Why is he like this?"

"We cannot say."

I knew so few words of Albanian that any sort of cross-examination was out of the question. One thing was obvious, it could not be an attack of malaria, because they would have recognised all the symptoms. My heart was torn by the anguish of those two men who simply stood like dumb animals, waiting for me to heal the child. For was I not a foreigner possessed of all knowledge? I went and pulled out my bag of medicines, and as I walked to the car my leech bites started bleeding again. The men watched me adjust the bandage, and one of them started to talk excitedly to the other and then to me. I could not follow a single word of his outpouring, but gathered that leeches had something to do with the boy's condition. We went over to him and the father pointed to my leg, then made a movement as though drinking water and pointed to the child.

"Boy—drink—water?" I said incredulously, and pointed to the marsh.

"Yes—yes," they answered.

At last we had diagnosed the case. The child was dying from leeches that were lodged somewhere in its stomach or intestines.

"How long ago boy drink water?"

They shook their heads.

I mixed a solution of salt and bismuth in tepid water, heated over the Primus, and we forced the patient to drink a mugful of the emetic. Then we waited for results. I don't know what thoughts were passing through the heads of those two men, but I heard a mocking voice that jeered with each heart-beat. "You have killed him—you have killed him." There was no reaction for over quarter of an hour. I felt my flesh going cold and clammy with fear, for the child looked far worse. Suddenly it struggled in a convulsion of pain and vomited four huge leeches; the salt water had worked the trick. But I insisted on another small dose of that unpleasant mixture, just in case there were any more.

The change in the expression of that tiny yellow face was wonderful to watch. Even so soon after the expulsion of the parasites the boy looked easier, and his tightly-clenched fingers relaxed their agonised grip on the father's hand. What I could not understand was how any child brought up in those surroundings could have been so stupid as to drink the marsh water, for it was quite obvious that the minute embryo leeches had entered the stomach some weeks before and had lived on the child ever since.

Whilst we wrapped up the precious burden, Wilson and Peter came up out of the marsh and with Peter's aid I told the father that I was not at all certain whether we had cured his son, but that we should be passing the swamp in two days on the way back to Tirana. He could come and report on the patient's condition. They said they would be there, and with simple thanks trudged off carrying the child.

We drove on to Lesh and lunched there at tea-time. The journey took us through some extraordinary scenery and over the worst road I have ever seen. At times one had to get out and rake away the piles of loose stones before the car could move forward at all. There was an iron bridge crossing the Mati River that Peter explained had been washed away each successive spring since 1928 when they put it up. The Italian engineers had reconstructed it so that it now withstood the raging torrents that mount up with the snow water and carry along logs of wood and vast boulders. Under Italian direction great forts have been built on the vantage points commanding the Lesh road.

From Lesh to Shkodra was an easy journey. The road follows the course of the Drini River. I noticed that we passed several large groups of men and women walking with pack animals laden with pots and pans and every sort of bundle. They were moving from the low-lying country to spend the summer on the healthier slopes of the Dukagjini Mountains. Each cavalcade was followed by a herd of cattle and sheep, and their exodus to the summer quarters takes several days' marching.

Shkodra is an enchanting place. It is divided into several sections by the waterways of the Drin, and the general formation of the lakeside where it is situated. It has an atmosphere of cosmopolitan activity, and you will hear snatches of nearly all the Balkan languages as you walk about the busy streets. The modern part is set back about half a mile from the lake. Our arrival at the hotel was made an occasion of considerable solemnity by the management, who knew the other two well for they had stayed there very often. The rooms were spacious and cool, and to my relief there was running water, a great luxury that enabled me to wash out various garments that the leech bites had soaked in blood.

Downstairs in a stone-flagged refectory we ate a wonderful meal of ministrone, stuffed quail, mutton pilav, spiced cakes and sour milk; it cost a little over one shilling and sixpence with tip. Afterwards Wilson and I walked through the town to leave a note with his colleague an Albanian doctor, while Peter went to church, for it was his mother's "saint's day" and he wished to remember her.

The streets of Shkodra were heavy with the scent of roses and night-flowering primrose. One saw flowers everywhere; in tiny public gardens that littered the town, stuck into the hats or coats of the passers-by and growing wild in greatest beauty round the mosques and other buildings. Not only roses, but yellow and blue irises, tiger lilies, scarlet carnations and giant golden asphodels seem to find a home wherever there is enough soil and moisture for their growth. The next morning, whilst Wilson

and Peter went off to do some work in the lakeside swamps, I wandered about the old town and bought some woven head-cloths and *opangj*. The latter are shoes made of a single thickness of leather sewn up over the toes and fastened to the feet with straps.

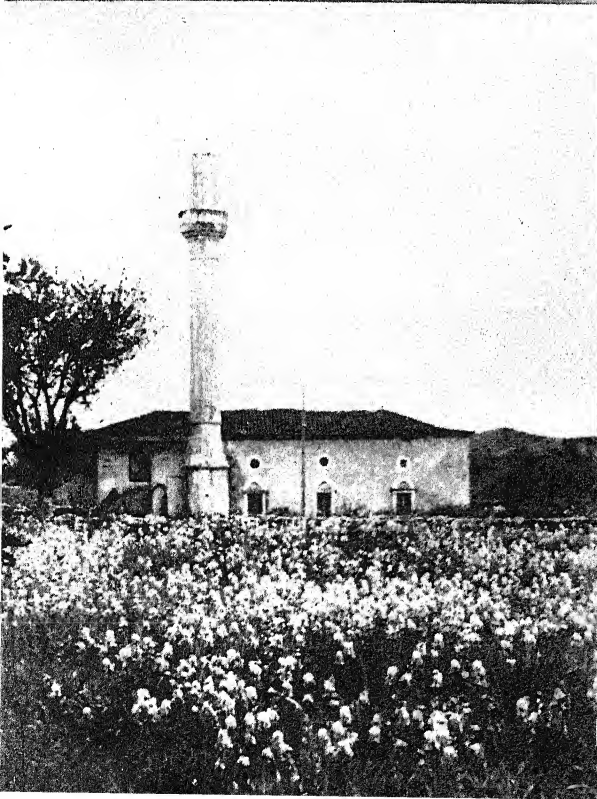
The old man who made them on the spot—for none he had in stock were big enough—had served as a cobbler to the French army. We chatted about the future of Albania and the stranglehold of Italian influence. He told me that even in 1928 Zog had been forced by his need of hard cash to mortgage the whole country for the sum of two million sterling.

The shoemaker, like his fellow craftsmen in Shkodra, had all the facts at his fingers' tips. He knew all about the forty per cent fall of the State Revenues and the Italian dream of annexing Albania and thus holding the key position to the Adriatic. He put down his tools and looking up at me with a piercing stare of defiance, said, "Once it was Englishmen who helped us with our army, but to-day they are merely tolerated for the appearance of things. The Italians control the entire policy of the country. They even planned our parliament house and built it with their own money."

When the shoes were finished we drank coffee together. No business is ever complete without the customer being offered that compliment. I shook hands with the shoemaker and walked down towards the water's edge with my mind full of the things he had told me. It seems incredible that other countries are prepared to sit still and watch the Mediterranean slowly but quite inevitably becoming an Italian lake.

In the shop where I bought the head-cloths they took me for an Austrian, but when I explained that this was not the case, apologies were offered and coffee was immediately brought in. A crowd of men were in the shop which was very dark and had a mysterious atmosphere of suspicion and intrigue. I rather think it was used as a clearing-house for smuggled goods that come across the lake from Jugoslavia. There are bands of water gipsies who carry on this rather risky trade—risky because the Albanian patrols fire first and ask questions afterwards. There was a big trap-door behind the counter, it obviously led direct to the water, for the shop was built out on piles sunk into the bottom of the lake. They sold excellent honey cakes in the shop, I bought a big bag of them and went out to find somewhere to sit down and eat. Some distance farther on I could see a mosque and decided to sit on the wall that surrounded it. As I drew nearer, and looked over the wall, I was greeted by one of the loveliest things I have ever seen. The ground was carpeted with irises. They were in full bloom and stood so thickly that only occasional blades of green shot up out of that azure blue carpet. I could have sat there indefinitely, but for the wasps that hovered round my honey cakes.

Some months later I showed a little boy a picture of the mosque and its iris beds, and explained that they only grew so beautifully because the ground was nearly always half under water. He was an intelligent child and said that he supposed the Albanians must love flowers so much that they were



prepared to put up with the marshes and malaria. I rather think it may be true. For if they set to work and drained the lakeside there would be no more irises or malaria.

In the afternoon we left Shkodra and drove back to Lesh, arriving at the village in the early evening. I went in to inspect a church whilst the others attended to certain business. The church was perched high up on the hillside overlooking Lesh from the opposite side of the river. The graveyard was full of broken tombstones and rank grass. I forced open the door and found myself in a gloomy darkness that smelt of sheep, and three hens careered away squawking. When my eyes became accustomed to the light I saw that the floor was deep in sheep droppings and decayed vegetation. Both windows had been boarded up, and apart from shafts of light that filtered in through the chinks the only other light came from a sanctuary lamp that burned before the altar. It was a place that made you feel that somebody was watching you. Although the chickens had found their way out of the church I felt convinced that I was not alone. Six candles and a crucifix stood out in sharp relief against the pitch black shadows. There was a missal and a stole lying on the altar, and as I drew nearer I could see that the altar linen was relatively clean.

"The church must be served by some one," I muttered.

The "some one" was standing in the doorway behind me had I but known it, for when I turned to go out a Franciscan greeted me in Italian. He had

been praying in the church when I forced my way in, and was on the point of ringing an alarm bell, thinking that it was surely an attempt to steal the altar fittings! I pressed five lek into his palm and walked back to the bridge where Wilson and Peter were waiting in the car.

Lesh is about three miles from the actual sea shore. In between come fresh and salt-water marshes where the river Drin loses itself in a many-mouthed delta. At the edge of this swamp we pitched our tents on a stretch of dry sandy soil, well protected from the possibility of gales that blow up without any warning near the coast.

Peter went off to a nearby house to buy eggs and butter whilst I bathed in the sea and Wilson wandered about looking for early mosquitoes. The sea was bitterly cold and tasted brackish, not salt. I imagine that this must be due to the large percentage of marsh water that percolates through the sandbars. There was only just enough time to dress before it became suddenly dark.

The butter arrived in a bottle carried by the daughter of the house where Peter had gone for food. He was laden with a basket of bread and eggs. She had come to look at the car, for he had promised her a ride the next morning. I went and arranged the tent for our meal—a wonderful spread of pilav made by the indispensable Peter, honey cakes and cherries supplied by self and cups of cocoa—the hallmark beverage of English respectability.

The tent was so made that mosquitoes could not get inside unless the safety flap was forgotten. The

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

safety flap was forgotten twice. We made short work of the mosquitoes that found their way in, but even



ALBANIAN CATHOLIC FROM LESH.

so I felt very much happier when the flap was tied up for the last time, and we lay down to sleep. At

intervals I woke up for the ground was acutely uncomfortable and listened to the high-pitched hum of countless mosquitoes stuck in the gauze-covered ventilator. How furious they must have been to see the three humans lying there only a few inches away all ready to be infected with malaria. The next morning we got up early and went round to the other side of the marsh to bathe.

Wilson said the water was far too deep and clean for leeches, so I stripped and plunged down a long way. We played about in the water and had a really good scrub down. Then two things happened that nearly ended in disaster.

A band of women was sighted coming along the road from Lesh headed by the same Franciscan who had spied on me in the church.

We were stark naked and dripping wet. Albanians have a code of morals that regards nakedness as a sin of the worst type. So we got back into the water and stayed there until they passed. But just before I climbed out again I thought that one last dive could not do any harm. Down and down I sank, swimming under water. When I came up again I shouted, "I've just seen a big fish—rather like an eel, it is swimming quite near me."

"That is no eel, it's a poisonous water snake," replied Peter, and helped me climb out as though the water had suddenly become boiling hot.

They collected specimens of mosquitoes from several houses and sheds near Lesh, during the morning, and it seemed a long time before we moved off back to the swamp where the beehive thing had

to be collected first. The many activities of the last days had put the sick boy clean out of my mind, but when Peter reminded me that the father would be waiting for me, I began to feel full of dread and apprehension. Had I helped or had I killed in helping?

We were soon to know, for the well-known mountains came in sight and the marsh was only another mile farther on.

At first I could see nobody waiting. "Perhaps they have gone back again?" I suggested to Peter.

"No," he replied; "they would wait all day if they ever came at all."

He was right, for we found not only the two men but three friends sitting under an oak chatting and staring out over those evil-placid waters. As they heard my footsteps walking towards the tree, the father of the child ran forward and clasped me by the hand, pouring out a stream of words that were absolutely unintelligible. I was so confused that the only thing I could think of to answer was "*Ku asht ay?*" ("How is he?")

"*Zotni, ay ast mirë,¹ falen nderës,*" he replied simply.

So our treatment of the leeches had worked, and the child was on the way to recovery. The father had brought a friend who spoke a few words of English to help interpret his thanks. But his words needed no interpreter, for the expression on his face spoke the fullest meaning of his gratitude. He wanted me to come back and live in his house, he would give

¹ Literally, "He lives—my thanks to you."

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

me an ox and a plough, I could do much good in the village with my knowledge. Would I go? No, I had to return to England in a few days' time.

They loaded me with presents, shoes, stockings



THE BOY'S FATHER.

and food whilst one of them took off his belt and tied it around my loins, wishing me a safe journey. Then the father took from his left hand a heavy silver ring and offered it to me with that wonderful greeting, *Tungatjeta*—Live for ever. At first, I

hesitated to accept it, but he pressed it into my hands with emphatic words. I was to take it for good luck, and never forget my promise to return to that spot if I stood in need of the ox and the plough. We shook hands and parted.

Beset with the noise of London's traffic and the irksome pettiness of life in a city, I look down at the ring and remember that miles away under another sky there stands a gnarled oak by the marsh-side where a man promised me another sort of life. Perhaps we shall never see each other again, but as long as I wear his gift, its magic spell will still carry me off to walk the unknown paths, alone and burden free.

But for that ring, the rest of this book would never have happened.

PART II

APRIL-MAY, 1936

CHAPTER THREE

I WAS dreaming that the compartment was full of parrots and men blowing whistles to encourage them to fight, when suddenly the train pulled up with a grinding shriek. It was early dawn, and extremely cold. I lay shivering and pulled the blankets round my neck only to expose two curiously yellow feet. The men stirring up the parrots slowly became real voices, chattering away like the dream parrots. Something was happening in the corridor, and I knew that it was rather a disturbing something from the heated tones of the conversation.

In that curious comatose condition that follows a rude awakening, I wondered why I had ever left England—why I had been persuaded to go by sleeper to Trieste, and above all why the blankets in this train were so uncomfortably short. The voices rose to a crescendo of excitement as several people stumped along the corridor. The train started off again. Some moments later they all processed back past my door, and I was just arranging the blankets to my satisfaction when I heard my own name being mispronounced several times. The procession had evidently halted outside the door. The attendant assured somebody that it was impossible for him to think of disturbing me until at least eight-thirty. Being English I should not understand such treatment—in Italy it might be otherwise. But they were

not content with this excuse. There was a lull in the conversation, and a sharp knock at the door.

"*Entrez,*" I answered. The door opened to admit a customs officer, and a gendarme—both Italians—and the harassed attendant, who started a flood of apologies for the intrusion. They saluted and said, "Duce." I looked at the Italians and then through the crack of the door, and saw four other armed men dressed in dark green.

The attendant explained in French that much against his will he had permitted these men to disturb me, but they wished "to see me about something."

"What about?" I answered.

"They do not explain that to me, Monsieur."

There was an awkward silence. Then one of the Italians launched off into a curious tirade about the English and Sanctions, the price of the lira and many other things I could not follow. My knowledge of Italian is very limited, but I managed to say, "Why are you here, and what do you want?" He replied with further protestations about Sanctions and Abyssinia, and tapped the grimy black portfolio beneath his arm.

The attendant with great hesitancy explained that the man had an abusive Sanctionist article in his portfolio written by me, and he had come to search the compartment for Communist and other anti-Fascist propaganda.

I laughed. The Italians regarded me with suspicious hatred, they were longing for a row so that they could call in the assistance of the soldiers

in the corridor. Everybody started talking at once.

"Show me this article I have written," I shouted above the babel.

"Impossible—that would never do," they insisted.

"But do you realise whom you are speaking to? I have been the guest of your government, I have ridden free of charge in your aeroplanes, and I have been presented to the Duce himself." They looked at each other thunderstruck as the attendant translated for me.

"Then that's the reason he has so treacherously betrayed us in this article," said the customs man, again tapping the book very significantly.

"Show me the article," I again demanded, making as though to pull the book away from the man. In his excitement it slid from under his arm and clattered to the floor, opening at the place where he had tucked in his pencil. There, pasted to the page, was a heading of an article written by a Philip Thornburn. I leant out of the bunk and snatching it up, answered, "But this isn't my name—neither have I the slightest interest in the Abyssinian question."

The attendant rounded on the customs man and his assistant. They remained unconvinced that Thornton and Thornburn were not the same person, but asked the attendant for my passport for further examination. Very reluctantly they had to admit to the attendant though not to me, that I was probably another person, in all probability it was a hoax, and that I'd changed my name to Thornburn for the occasion of writing the abusive article.

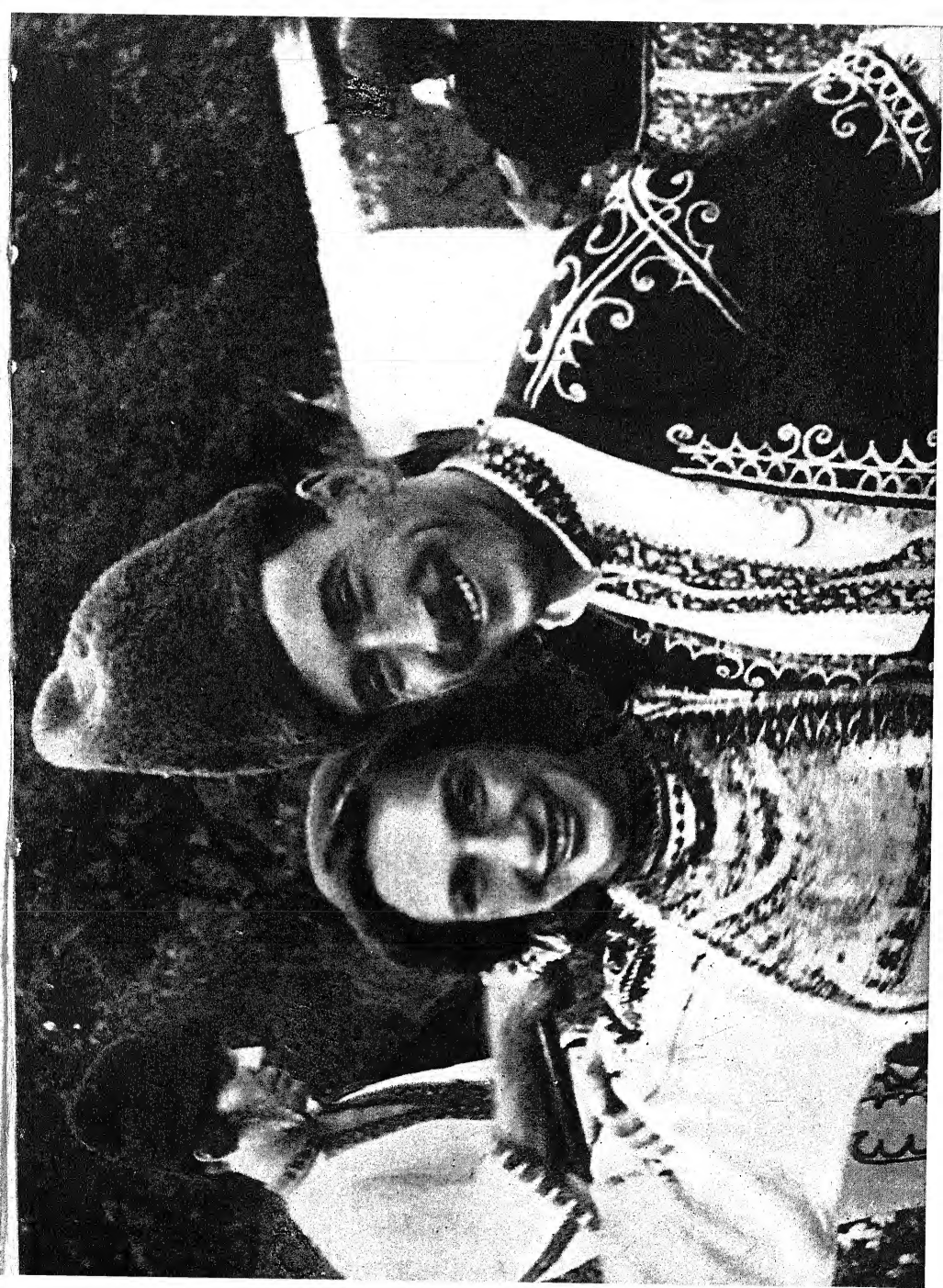
"But we must examine his other papers—oh, yes, we must certainly examine his other papers," put in the undaunted official, tenaciously guarding his opportunity of making life unpleasant for the loathsome English.

"*Avec grand plaisir—cherchez partout, mais laissez-moi tranquille,*" I insisted, and turned over in the bunk with my face to the wall like Ahab. This did the trick, they were completely nonplussed; for how could they with any thoroughness search the compartment with me lying like a log.

"We shall return when the signor is dressed," said the customs man firmly, and with a bow the fantastic trio retired and walked off down the corridor to the dining-car.

It had somewhat scared me so I drank a big gulp of brandy from my flask and dropped off to sleep. Three hours later the attendant came back and woke me with an inquiry as to whether I was going to eat my breakfast in the dining-car or would I rather have it in the compartment. He advised the latter plan as "the Italian gentlemen might return whilst I was away and cause me some discomfort in their search for the papers" they were so anxious to find! But I decided to wash and dress as quickly as possible and go and eat with the other passengers.

While I was brushing my hair the attendant came back to announce that there was no need to fear the customs men any more as they had found a new victim—a Bulgar whose passport was not quite in order. Closing the door with great caution and coming very close, the attendant then confided that



he was a Serb and heartily loathed the sight of the Italians. "The day is not far off, Monsieur, when we shall——" And he drew his right forefinger across his throat with a realistic gurgle. We laughed—and he slipped away to see how the wretched Bulgar was faring.

I was more than delighted when we reached Trieste. The Italian ship that I boarded the next day was as pleasant a surprise as the experience in the train was discouraging. Trieste is a stately town. Quiet and very spacious streets paved with gigantic blocks of biscuit-coloured stone run down in straight lines to the sea front. It has not very long been Italian property and there are large numbers of Serbian people still living there who have been forbidden either to keep their Slavonic surnames or languages. High up behind the town in an impregnable position stand a medieval fort and a church. The choir were saying a special office on the Friday evening before Palm Sunday when I went in and knelt with the crowd, packed into the strange half-shadows. A business-like nun pressed a two-foot candle into my hand and asked for five lira in exchange. But I managed to get a two-lira one instead. Five lira meant a lot of money—even for a good candle or a successful prayer one and eightpence is a bit excessive. The service meandered on and I became nauseated both by the breath-stench of the man beside me and the inconsequence of the choir boys. I got up and left.

When I got out of the church all the lights in Trieste were twinkling in the quickening dusk, and

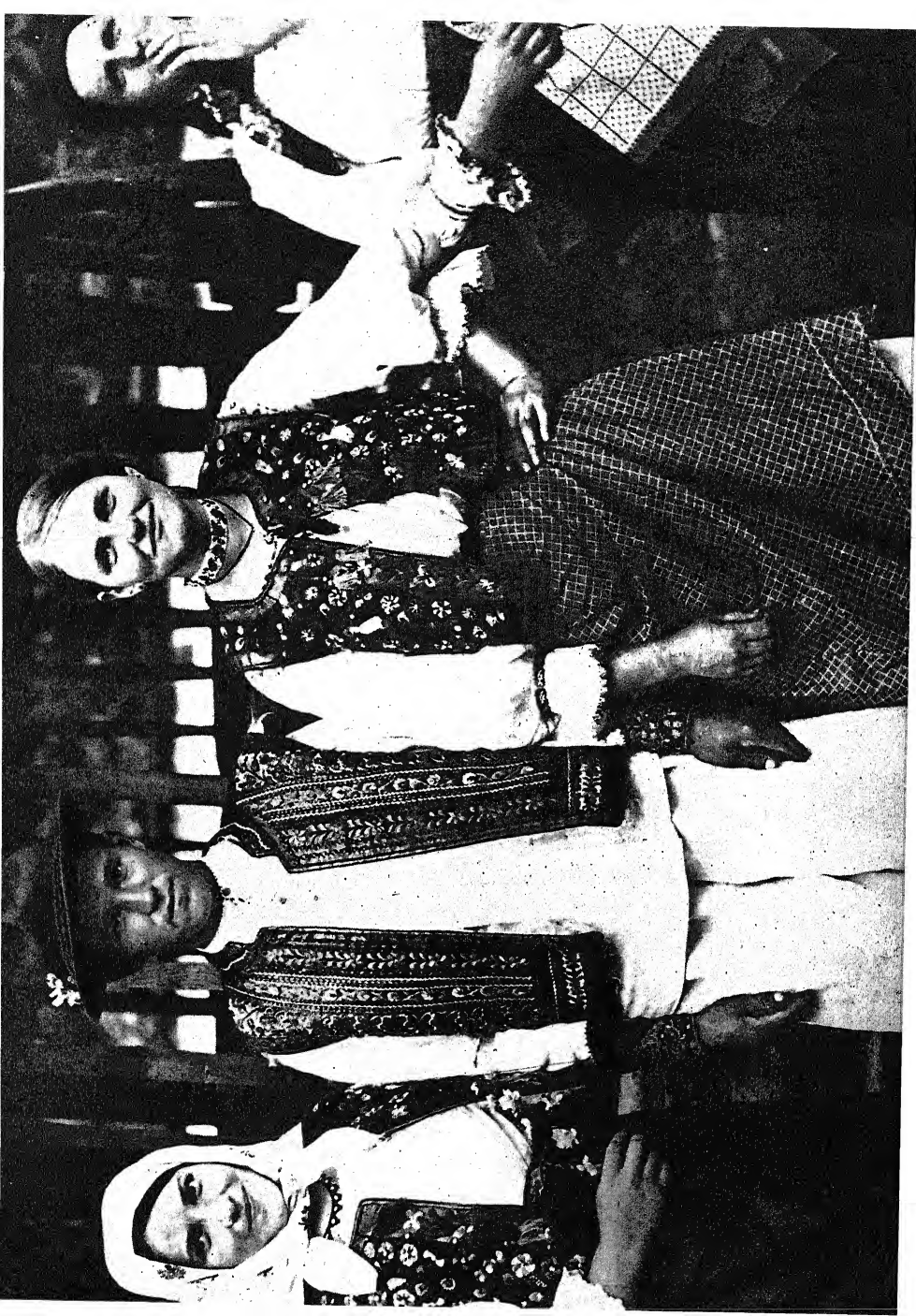
the aroma of countless suppers floated up with the grey smoke of countless chimneys. A clock struck, and I turned round from the parapet where I was leaning and gazed back at the fortress. At that very moment a series of flood-lights were switched on, and the entire building was illuminated. It was then that I saw the enormous twenty-foot letters of the word DUX emblazoned on the outer walls in about five different places. Mussolini knows just where to chalk up his name. Even to one who was used to Piccadilly Circus it was extremely awe-inspiring, but what impression would that sort of thing make in England? Imagine Windsor Castle with a BALDWIN or Dover Castle labelled LANSBURY. I may have thought it impressive and perhaps strange, but not so the old Franciscan who came slowly up the steep steps and read his evening paper by the glare of the flood-lights. His newspaper was full of the latest activities on the Abyssinian front. But nothing seemed out of the ordinary to him, neither the illuminations nor the rumours in his fluttering pages. It is a curious thing that the national characteristics we attach to various countries are nearly always belied by the inhabitants. The Italians are supposed to be gay, irresponsible and romantic, the Dutch stolid, hard and gross minded, the English like to think themselves fair-minded *sahibs*. But every Italian I have met has been a complete materialist often devoid of any imagination, while the Dutch with whom I have danced and lived in close contact are explosively gay and always witty. As to the English, they are at their best in a country

like Greece or Turkey where their sublime isolation is a mask for indifference to everybody they see and almost everything they eat. In Athens I met a party of English middle-class tourists roaming about on the Acropolis. One of them asked me a few questions about the city and slowly we got into conversation—but the only comment that they unanimously made was that Athens was filthy and the roads were “damned bad.” The Acropolis did not cut much ice with them.

When I arrived eventually at the hotel it was quite dark. The hotel I had chosen was only the width of the road away from the water which stretched so black and silently into the night. From the balcony of my room I could see the whole sweep of the bay, all aglow with the lights. As usual when I came to undo my sponge bag in the bathroom there was no soap, and after some ten minutes delay a piece about as big as three walnuts was produced by the smiling chamber-maid. That piece of soap was the cause of a very tense scene the next morning when I discovered an item on the bill, “*Sapone extra, 5 lira.*” Five lira for two ounces of second-hand soap. One shilling and eight pence! I quietly changed the five lira to a one. Nobody said anything, they were far too glad to see English money. At that moment a pound-note could be sold in Italy in the black bourse for about a hundred lira. With much bowing and scraping, I was handed a fresh bill and my English pound note was accepted with fingers that almost trembled with excitement.

I left the hotel with an escort of curious in-

dividuals who were going to see me safely into the boat—at a price. After certain formalities I went aboard the Italian ship that was to take me to Dubrovnik, and no sooner had the stewardess shown me to my cabin than the fun started with my escort. They all demanded remuneration varying from ten lira for having seen me on to the quayside, to five lira per package for the luggage. With serene if callous firmness, I pressed four lira into the palm of the fellow who really had helped by carrying the bags, and requested the others to leave the cabin. They all started to rave and menace me with arm waving and stamping, but I remained as though stone deaf and quietly unpacked. That is by far the best way of ridding yourself of such attentions; bitter experience has taught me that argument is as futile as exhausting. The gentle thanks of the man who actually had brought the baggage aboard was very touching. When the others had stormed out he remained behind, and asked if he could be of further assistance.



CHAPTER FOUR

THERE were only twenty-four passengers on board that boat, and she was designed to carry over a hundred. "Sanctions and rumours of the way tourists were being treated in the country had ruined the Easter traffic," explained the stewardess to me. She was heartily sick of all this nonsense in Abyssinia. It was a pity the Duce was not a passenger; he would have enjoyed her small talk as much as I did. She was a thin, shrivelled woman of middle age with a pile of hair piled up in small rolls and twists into a shape like a cornucopia. Dressed very neatly in a black silk dress with a lace apron of the same colour, she darted all over the decks and harangued everybody she saw. Her breath smelt alternatively of spirits and peppermint, so I supposed that she suffered from neurasthenic depression, caused by indigestion and the bad season, and made up for it by having a good few "quick ones." On the other hand the peppermint need not have meant dyspepsia and could have been a way of getting rid of the traces of the "quick ones." My interest in her changed somewhat from amusement to defensiveness when I went suddenly into the cabin and caught her red-handed running through a small suitcase. She pretended to be putting out my things, but I knew perfectly well what she was after, and no further doubts could be entertained as to the

explanation of the peppermint. She had half-emptied my brandy flask.

With a curious dignity she rose without any explanation and left me in the cabin.

I put on my hat and went up to the promenade deck. There was about half an hour to spare before lunch, so I started a tour of exploration. The passengers were sharply divided into three groups. The violently enthusiastic, the somnolent dozers who rarely moved save to eat a meal, and the solitary figures who moved aimlessly about the decks sometimes staring out over the water and sometimes pretending to read a book. Among the first group were two English people of the well-to-do county type. Everything they saw was "too marvellous" or "quite too lovely." I enlisted in the ranks of the solitary wanderers and tried to read a book all about the Dalmatian Coast in spring, but every time I got to a really interesting part a gong rang and we all surged into the dining-room. The food was excellent and the wine was poor. I drank some quarts of lemonade on that two-day trip.

Drinking lemonade was partly responsible for my meeting the two English people. They also demanded lemonade. Since we were the only three people not drinking wine, we were served from the same jug by the same waiter. Heaven knows why he could not have given each of us a separate jug, but he may have been under the impression that we were friends. The jug was left on my table, and I saw the woman looking very longingly towards it. At length she gave me a disarming smile, and said very loudly

and clearly, "Would you mind terribly much if we had some of your lemonade."

The lemonade was passed over with effusive thanks from the man I presumed was her husband. A conversation started, one of those nebulous conversations that you can hear any day at almost any hour in the country homes of England. All about nothing in particular. As I was half-turned away from them it became increasingly difficult to carry on the conversation and eat in comfort. This the man realised. "Won't you come over and join us at this table?"

If ever you eat at the same table with anybody, I believe you have made a very tangible link with them. Sometimes this link is a very happy one, sometimes it becomes an insufferable nuisance. Past experience taught that, for the most part, such moves resulted tediously. But this was only for so few hours that almost without thinking I found myself saying, "That's very kind of you—I'd love to."

The woman on closer inspection proved to have very lovely features and a surprisingly natural complexion. The man might also have been attractive, but a heavy moustache disfigured his face like a pair of miniature besoms stuck together under his nose. We talked, as English travellers do, about the food, the then recent bereavement of the Royal Family, and why we were on the boat. When it obviously came to my turn to explain why I wasn't at home, I fought shy of telling them. I felt so little *sympathie* from the flowing moustache. But it soon leaked out under their carefully put questions,

and I boldly said that I was simply wandering about the Balkans in search of songs and dances, and perhaps gossip. If you own to being a *folk-song* collector and use the word "folk" in the usual luscious way, the chances are ten to one that the conversation will mysteriously die out as the public are—with some justification—convinced that people who have anything to do with that fateful word are either fantastical vegetarians or dress reformers.

After lunch the Moustache said he was going to lie down for a short nap—as he had to take care of himself. His wife and I went for a walk on deck.

As soon as he was out of sight and hearing, she embarked on a long and detailed account of how Rupert had been persuaded to go for a trip to the Adriatic Coast to pick up "After a nasty tummy op."

"What sort of operation—a very serious one?" I was determined to know.

"Well, you see, he has always complained of pains here," she indicated a spot on the left side, close in by the edge of the ribs.

"Gall stones?"

"Why—yes, how did you know?" She blushed.

"Your husband walks like a man who has had that operation, besides you showed me where they cut him."

"You know too much. But you should have seen him last month, he was a wretched figure. Kept saying that he'd never walk again, and here he is on the Dalmatian Coast."

"He certainly looks very happy."

"But he just hated the idea of coming away, you know.

"I said, 'Rupert, you simply *must* go for a cruise.' And as he hates the sea we compromised, and here we are—only two days at sea and then a long rest at Dubrovnik."

"I'm going to Dubrovnik, but I'm staying in the part called Ragusa."

"Oh—is it divided up, then, into parts?"

"Yes, it is very confusing, there are no fewer than four different names—as you will quickly discover—that are used there. Dubrovnik the town, Gruž the port, and Lapad where they have the big *plage*."

"And Ragusa?" she said, bewildered.

"Ragusa is the old Dalmatian name for Dubrovnik itself." I felt more and more like a Cook's guide, and added, "Don't you think this coast is one of the most hideous things you've ever seen?" pointing to the endless succession of limestone cliffs that sloped down into the water.

"Yes, hideous; not at all like the eulogies. I've read about them in that book . . ."

"I'm reading it," I said explosively. "So far it's led me completely down the garden path—miles and miles of flowers—but all we can see is barren grey limestone and shrivelled tufts of undergrowth."

"Quite too devastating."

We found ourselves silently gazing at the cliffs sweeping past, sometimes so near the ship's side that you could, with an effort, have thrown a stone to the shore. And yet, as I was to discover, these

lifeless sun-scorched walls of rock were the nearest picture of the real spirit that dominates the Serb character—hard, ruthless and fearless, but also hospitable and independent. Whether you meet a Bosnian, a Montenegrin, a Croat or a Slovene, the same dynamic drive is the making of his character. They all like to think that they are very different, and each will claim superiority—what inhabitant of Zagreb does not look down on Skoplje—but I find they all ultimately give me the same impression. Like various types of terrier, they look vastly different in shape and colour, but have several basic characteristics in common.

As I stood there half day-dreaming, a quiet voice inquired if the Signora wanted anything done—any clothes to iron or shoes cleaned. It was the stewardess. Smelling of her most recent “quick one” she stood there in the neighbouring doorway, a picture of domestic efficiency and devotion. The Englishwoman swung round abruptly, almost as startled as I was, and dismissed the stewardess with thanks.

“I don’t *like* that woman, you know. I can’t say why, but she just doesn’t quite *satisfy* me, if you know what I mean.”

“I think I do,” I answered, and quickly remembering my precious brandy, added as I turned to go, “If you will excuse me, I will rush off and see that everything is as it should be in my cabin. I’ve a queer feeling that something may be missing.”

“Do; I’ll be quite happy here.”

I reached the cabin, and plunged my hands into



the bag where the flask was. All was well, but she had helped herself to a whole bar of chocolate. I lay on the bunk and dropped off to sleep. The Adriatic is very tiring.

You arrive in the afternoon at Gruž¹ if you take the Italian ship from Trieste. The Yugoslav customs officials come on board, and check up all the foreign currency you have brought into the country, and then ransack your baggage. They are quiet and thorough, pulling everything out into the open that looks in the least suspicious in shape or weight. My cinematograph was examined very closely and well shaken, to see if it contained any odds and ends such as bullets or hand grenades. They have a deep-seated fear of bombs all over the country. In Belgrad you are often ordered to walk on the opposite side of the road if you are carrying a bulky parcel anywhere near the Ministries. Where life is cheap, assassination is no rarity. I have come to the conclusion that the more innocent or innocuous the mien of the traveller in Yugoslavia, the more careful are the police and secret agents, in seeing that he does not get into any mischief.

The only trouble with my cinematograph seemed to be that it was a brand hitherto unknown in the experience of the Customs men. This fact made it necessary for them to inscribe its name and number on the back page of my passport. At last I was ready to leave the ship. The stewardess came forward for a tip. Perhaps she read my thoughts,

¹ Pronounced Grooje, the z a je in French.

for as she advanced with a peculiarly fox-like smile to bid me good-bye, she halted and stared hard in front of her, turned abruptly on her heel, and vanished into a doorway. At the foot of the gangway was a crowd of soldiers, peasants, taximen, hotel porters and children. Everybody was talking in the same throaty hissing language. Occasional laughs as the passengers came off the ship. I looked round for the cap bearing the name of the hotel I had chosen. No sign of one anywhere, so I boarded a taxi and was whisked off round to the other side of the harbour. I waved good-bye to my English friends as they passed me, driving off to their far more expensive hotel up by the town.

Imagine a three-storey building like a miniature Florentine palace, with a gravelled courtyard in front and a lodge at the front gate. The car swung in and pulled up with a jolt, making the gravel swirl behind the back wheels. The courtyard that had been quite deserted on my entry became alive with an army of little smiling men. They seized my bags and said good-day in one language after another—but not English. I was clearly welcome and apparently expected. The hall porter showed me up to my room. The interior of the hotel was not as impressive as the exterior. Bare plastered walls decorated with curious stencilled patterns, a slight smell of carbolic acid and mothballs greeted me as we walked up the broad marble stairs. The bedroom was airy and spacious, looking out over the vegetable garden at the back of the hotel. I tried the bed, and

found that the mattress was constructed in three separate pieces that lay side by side like flagstones. There was no blanket under the bottom sheet but that could be remedied later. I longed to go out into the sun and walk about.

Downstairs the porter advised me on the tram service to Dubrovnik. A party of three Americans were complaining about the inadequacy of the view from their verandah and demanding a better room. The porter, luckily, did not understand half the vituperations they poured forth. I walked slowly along the harbour road towards the tram junction. It was lovely to me. Ever since I can remember anything I have loved to walk beside water, and this place was all water and little sailing boats.

The tram was full of well-to-do peasants and a sprinkling of tourists. Remembering that it was Palm Sunday, I thought I would find a church and hear Vespers. Sitting on either side of me were some very sober Czechs, they were talking about a procession somewhere in Dubrovnik. More and more people boarded the tram as we crawled up the hill to the town. In the far distance I could hear rhythmical singing. It was primitive and vigorous, and hit me like an electric current passing up the spine. The Czechs heard it and squirmed round in their seats to look out of the window. Very gradually the voices died away—I hoped that we were not going to miss the procession. But it appeared we were behind it, for when at last the tram reached the terminus at Dubrovnik I could see the tail end of the procession disappearing into

the depths of the great gate. I rushed down the slope that leads to the gate and fought my way through the crowd into the church that lies immediately inside the town walls. The church was jammed so tightly with people that it was impossible for them to kneel.

Here was a very different atmosphere from that Service at Trieste. Far less presence of bodies, and no garlic. The married women were dressed in beautiful coifs of starched linen, tied and pinned into a shape that resembles the head-dress of the Bruges Sisters. The girls wore their hair plaited round a blue and red pill-box hat. I could hear a small choir and two priests chanting in Serbian with occasional Latin responses. They had started on the Stations of the Cross, and as each scene from the Passion was visited it was removed from the wall by two vested monks. Evidently they were going to process round the town with these objects when the service was over, so I decided to leave and find a good place to watch them come out of the church. Outside the church is an enormous fountain like a decorated plum cake made of stone. It offered an excellent view, if one could find a place on its steps. I managed this after a couple of charges. Nobody seemed to mind me pushing—in London I should have had a torrent of abuse from the pushed.

It became uncomfortable standing there waiting in the blazing sun, and more people came and stood by the fountain, until I could see nothing but an assortment of heads and hats that filled the wide piazza. Somebody gave me a shove that bid fair to

sweep me clean off my feet. When I got back my balance I had a good look at the three people who had been responsible for pushing so violently. To my surprise it was the Americans! They had somehow contrived to worm their way into that crowd, and Fate had chosen that they should stand in front of me. At that moment the main door of the church opened, and a number of dignitaries filed out, attended by small acolytes dressed in purple. Behind them came a choir, and after the choir followed the fourteen Stations of the Cross carried shoulder high. Between every two Stations was a banner or a sacred image of one of the saints. The crowd became still and awe-struck in reverence as this solemn line of saints and tableaux of the Passion filed past to the liturgical chanting of the choir.

Some of the images looked tawdry and even hideous. It seemed rather a pity to have dragged the less beautiful carvings into the revealing brilliance of the sunlight. On either side of each section of the procession walked monks with collecting-bags on short poles, and according to the affection or preference of the crowd for the images, so their alms were given and their prayers muttered in the saint's name. I could not help noticing one quite revolting carving of Jesus tearing His garments open and revealing a huge magenta heart. Nobody seemed to like it, nor did they subscribe to the image collection.

It would have terrified me to look at such a thing for long. The Americans also noticed that the Sacred Heart had few votaries, and after some

moments' reflection, one of them, a middle-aged woman, remarked with naïve simplicity to her neighbour, "Look, Amy, that poor old Jesus. He don't get no place, huh?"

On the way back to the hotel I called in at an agency to inquire about the possibility of getting across to Skoplije by bus. The other alternative was to go by an enormous detour via Mostar and Sarajevo. Skoplije¹ was the first point where I had a definite job of work arranged, after months of correspondence with Serbians, who were most anxious for me to see and film the dances of the district. At Skoplije also I was to meet my two friends, Maud and John, together we were to journey south, hunting for dances. Our route was unfixed. Our final objective was Athens. After Athens they were to return via the Dalmatian coast, whilst I went on my own solitary way.

One of the things that every traveller has to face if he determines to go off the beaten track, is an endless supply of false information. You get to the pitch of disbelieving everything you hear, and making your own often disastrous arrangements. I hate travelling in trains, unless they are very fast ones. Buses or mules or bicycles are easier and often much faster. In countries like Albania, where there are no trains at all, and practically no roads or horses worth the name, you often have to walk by the side of a donkey carrying your luggage. Even when you find a fair-sized animal, it is often preferable to walk; it depends on the assortment of

¹ Skoplije is pronounced Skop-leeyeh. As two syllables, the second slurred.

livestock and scabs on the animal's back whether you decide to ride.

The bus agency was run by a charming man who invited me to sit down and drink coffee, whilst he unfolded maps and routed out correspondence about the bus connections between Dubrovnik and Kossowska Mitrovica. No service went through to Skoplije, and I should have to take the train from K. Mitrovica.

"I shall do all I can to oblige you. I know how particular the English are, and will arrange for you to be taken by private car for the last part of the journey," said the smiling agent, showing a neat row of gold stoppings in the lower jaw.

We drank our coffee and discussed the merits of the hotel I was staying in.

"The manager of that hotel is a personal friend of mine, we served together on the Montenegrin front from the very first day of the war with the Austrians. But he is more brave than intelligent; I often wonder however he managed to get through those campaigns alive."

He called for fresh coffee, and lit a cigar. Slowly we engineered the conversation round on to my proposed trip to Skoplije, for it would have been a breach of etiquette at our first meeting to have talked business without a preliminary discussion, besides neither of us had any cause for haste.

Unfolding a scale map of the district, which was mounted on a canvas as large as a bedsheet, he traced out the route I was to take.

"From here to Cetinje will take a morning's ride. Then from Cetinje to Podgorica, where you will spend the night."

"Are there any good hotels in Podgorica?" I asked brightly.

Had I ever seen the place I might have known how funny I was being, but the bus agent only smiled indulgently, and said with a dreary lack of assurance, "There *is* a hotel. It is not a very pleasant one, but you will find it adequate." We both stared hard at the map, and he continued, "The next day you will cross the mountains to Andrevica, and thence to Peć."

"In the bus?"

"No, I shall arrange for you to have a private car from Podgorica to carry you right through to K. Mitrovica."

"How much will that cost?"

"That depends on the car, and how many passengers you carry. But rest assured, you shall have the best seat, next to the driver."

"And you can arrange all this for me? It is most kind of you."

"A great pleasure, M'sieur, a great pleasure. You are the first gentleman to cross the mountains this year. Not many people go on to Peć."

With much mutual bowing and handshaking I left the shop, and promised to come on Tuesday morning for my ticket, and also to hear of his arrangements for the private car. How childishly simple it all seemed, and how obliging he had been, I thought as I walked back. Ignorance is veritable



GYPSES DANCING A KOLLO SKÖPLIJE.

VILLAGERS DANCING NEAR ALBANIAN FRONTIER.



bliss. Had I known what lay ahead I might have taken the next boat home.

I do not attach any blame to him for not having told me more about that route and its difficulties; after all, how was he to know that for miles the road was blocked with snow and that the hotel in Podgorica was frowned on even by the local inhabitants. One has to remember that there always is a "first gentleman to cross the mountains this year," and that until he has run the gauntlet it is almost impossible to check up on the conditions of the road until the driver gets home and sends a message. In a country where there is nothing in the nature of an A.A. patrol to keep travellers posted with the latest news, it may take five or six weeks for accurate information to find its way across the desolation of South Serbia. Even the travel agency that has a monopoly of the public's inquiries will furnish you with information that is often as fantastic in its inaccuracy as disastrous in its advice.

CHAPTER FIVE

BEFORE I had left England a friend had given me an introduction to a Countess B. who lived near Dubrovnik, and I decided on my way back to the hotel that I would call and present the letter that evening. In the hotel garden they had a lengthy discussion as to which of the countesses I could mean. Several people advised me that she lived some miles along the coast. It seemed so vague, and I half decided not to go, when an old boatman who had joined the advisory council said he knew exactly where the countess lived, and would take me there for 40 dinars, adding, "It is a very long way off." But he agreed to take 25 dinars, and we started in the calm evening light across the harbour towards Gruž. I took off my coat and rowed too; we were making very little headway, and I wanted to get there before it became dark. We shot across that harbour in record time, and rounded the point by the railway station. I settled down to what I imagined was going to be a strenuous half-hour's work. After passing one or two villas, the boatman shouted out, "Staj—Staj." We had arrived; the very long way was about half a mile. I paid him and told him not to wait.

I ought never to have paid that visit. The countess was clearly not at home. No sign of life greeted the pandemonium I made with the door-

knocker. It was a great rambling house, with a high wall running round it, pierced with spy holes the size of a man's head. The bangs of the door-knocker echoed through the empty rooms as in a cavern, but nobody came. I climbed up a trellis and looked over the parapet of the first floor verandah, and found a huge black dog of uncertain breed waiting to bite me if I ventured any farther. Thanks to the savage noise this animal made when I retreated, somebody lit a candle and came cautiously towards the front door.

"Who is it?" said a voice from within, speaking Serbian.

"I have a letter for Madame la Comtesse," I said in French.

"I don't speak French," it replied in German.

"I have a letter for the esteemed Countess," came my answer in German.

"Please pass it to me," said the unseen person, this time in Italian, opening as it spoke a small trap-door grille high up in the massive door.

I poked my letter through the square opening, and replied in Italian, "Will you please give this to the Countess. I will wait here for an answer."

"*Ja wohl danke schön gnädige Herr,*" came back, as the letter disappeared.

I waited about quarter of an hour—it grew quite dark and very mysterious, even frightening, as the big dog shuffled and growled about behind the fastened door.

Quite suddenly a light, and then another, appeared in the big salon on the first floor, and I

could hear feet racing down stone steps towards the front door. Somebody was wrenching at the bolts on the other side, and cursing quietly. At last the door swung inwards, and a shrivelled old man stood bowing within, he spoke to me charmingly in curious guttural French. "Please come in, M'sieur. Madame la Comtesse awaits the honour of your approach.

The big dog, however, was not so anxious to await the honour. He stood like a rock and snarled, licking his chops.

"J'ai grand peur de votre chien."

"Pay no attention to Vasfi, M'sieur, he is a silly dog." He dealt Vasfi a great blow with his fist, and the dog slunk off, growling more than ever.

"Please follow me, M'sieur; Madame is in the salon."

We crossed a stone-flagged hall, and mounted the stairs. The entire place was made of carved marble. Walls, bannisters, floor and staircase, everything, even the giant chairs were of alabaster or marble. Vasfi slunk on ahead of us, intending to miss nothing. I was glad that the old servant came between me and Vasfi's slobbering jaws.

We arrived on a landing, and crossed it to the barn-like salon. The old man went forward and announced me with such finesse I might have been a Royal personage. The Countess rose from an arm-chair, and greeted me in French, apologising for the strange reception, but explaining that "in these parts we so very rarely ever see any visitors after dark that the house is never ready to receive."

"I find from this letter that you are making a film of the dances of this and other countries. I hope you will meet with great success, and not find yourself in prison. This is a barbarous country, run by ferocious madmen. They rule with guns and the fear of death. But you will doubtless be safe. I can be of very small use to you; the letter asks me to help you in any way that may occur to me. Beyond immediately warning you to be extremely careful of all police and all soldiers I can be of no use. They are illiterate busybodies." She paused for breath, and poured out two glasses of vermouth.

"I am much obliged for anything you can tell me."

"Whatever I tell you, you will think exaggerated. I am an old helpless woman, a relic of a past civilisation. But I remember a better day. When *we* ruled this country——"

"Madame is an Austrian?"

"I am."

We sat in silence and drank the warm sticky vermouth. I glanced round the palatial room, it was devoid of any ornamentation save a coat-of-arms carved into the stonework over the fireplace. No pictures hung on the marble walls, the only furniture was a few red plush chairs and the occasional table at which we were seated. A small vine grew in a tub right across one wall. In the light of the solitary oil lamp that lit the room, it made fantastic shadow patterns against the milky stones.

"I live as you see in a state of mean penury."

"It is a very beautiful house," was all I could think of to say as an answer.

"My children are either married to foreigners, or dead—the Serbians saw to that." She looked hard at me and added, "Are you really doing this work you profess or are you just another of these clever English masqueraders?"

I sat up with a jerk.

"What sort of masquerade could I play, Madame?"

"There are many rôles for the intelligent spy," said the Countess, with a twinkle in her eye.

"Oh, my dear Mr. Thornton, you need have no fear of me, I am a silly old woman, but I think a lot!"

"Why should you think me a spy?" My breath and courage had come back after another quick sip of vermouth.

"You English, you appear so stupid—so *dumb*, but you are always the best spies, your government has spies everywhere and in every guise."

"And myself? Roaming about for folk dances and songs?"

"*Cher ami—c'est pour ça que j'ai peut-être raison!*"

We laughed and filled our glasses again. It was beginning to dawn on me that this outspoken and amusing old lady was after all giving me the very soundest advice that I could wish for. She was preparing me, if I but knew it, for the endless storms that were ahead. Her intuition was astonishing. Solitude sharpens the wits and often gives telepathic powers to those who know how to benefit by loneliness. Certainly the Countess was reading my mind

as easily as she might have read a book. Her next comment showed as much.

"You are asking yourself what I am doing here all alone in this great decayed villa?"

"Yes—I was," I admitted.

"Simply waiting for the next war, and watching its preparations develop under my aged nose."

"A war?"

"Why, of course. Do you suppose the Italians and the Serbs are going to live side by side with each other for ever. Nobody really knows who was behind that assassination of Alexander. They gave out that it was Hungary. But I myself know for a fact, because his brother often dined here in the old days that . . ." But she went no further with the sentence.

Some part of her mind still pondered over the possibilities of my visit. "Enough of that. Tell me, when do you leave Dubrovnik?"

"Next Wednesday if possible—for Skoplije."

"Skoplije is a dangerous place—full of hatred. They blinded my coachman there after the war. . . ."

I sat thinking for quite a long time before I spoke.

"But did not the Austro-Hungarian army do some horrible things—I have seen some post-cards in the town of mass hangings of civilians and atrocities that scarcely bear thinking about." She cut me short.

"That is just war—war is brutality, lust and stupidity all rolled into one, it will continue as long as the races of Europe are organised solely for the purpose of profiteering."

"Then there is no remedy, you think?"

"Remedy—of course. Disease is the remedy. Scatter leprosy or plague all over central Europe in the hot months, add to it typhus and cholera and I guarantee peace for fifty years at least. People would die, of course—perhaps some millions, but everybody would be too busy fighting disease to bother about frontiers and Armament Treaties."

"I have always thought that myself," I answered. "But have been regarded as a lunatic for venturing to say such things in public."

"Of course—naturally. All ideas that solve the nations' problems by means that are drastic and uncomfortable and give no scope for medals and decorations, are classed as stupid."

We talked on for another half-hour about the Countess's friends in England, and I left, feeling I had met one of the most remarkable and entertaining women in Europe.

When I arrived back at the hotel, after walking right round the Gruž harbour, I discovered that there were lights in all the windows of the lodge at the front gates. It turned out to be the dining-room. I went in to have my first meal at the hotel.

On the ground floor they had constructed the kitchens, and the whole of the top floor was used to seat the guests. I only ate two meals there; the food was very insipid. Most hotels in Dubrovnik are run so that you are at liberty to have your meals where and when you please.

My real reason for eating at the hotel was rather a childish one. I wanted to have a really good look

at Franz von Papen and his family. They were staying there at Lapad, and were treated, I imagine, as though travelling incognito. His three daughters were with him and his wife.

Hitler would have been justifiably proud of that trio of von Papen children. They were saturated in Nazi propaganda. She hated France because of the half-black children the negro garrisons left behind in the Rhineland. She despised the English because we were a race fast becoming effete and sexless. I forget just what was wrong with the wretched Serbs, but Russia came in for a good share of fantastic recriminations.

As though reciting a litany, she announced to me that Russia is the Mother of all that is Vile and Foul, all that is Obscene and Wicked, all that is Cruel and Unjust.

Perhaps one of Stalin's young ladies would say the same about Germany.

The other two daughters were less obtrusively patriotic, but they walked about with the military precision of soldiers. I don't think I ever saw any of that family smile or laugh once during the four days I was at the hotel, except on one occasion, when von Papen was chatting with the proprietor, who made a joke about the Italians in Abyssinia meeting with less success than the Queen of Sheba.

Von Papen has had one of the oddest political careers in Europe. To-day he is credited with fostering in Vienna the Austro-German "moral anschluss." But it is not so long ago that he nearly felt the rough edge of Hitler's displeasure in the

blood-purge of June 30th, 1934. Exiled Germans I have met in England have always insisted that Von Papen's survival has been a triumph of the "good family" background. They sarcastically comment that the biggest feat he pulled off was the careless delivery of the entire German Spy System into the hands of the American authorities. Unfortunately he had—perhaps still has—a mania for saving his cheque-book counterfoils. The English Secret Service managed somehow to search Von Papen's baggage on his way back in 1917, and thirty Germans, including Von Rintelen, found themselves in the dock—on the strength of these unfortunate scraps of paper.

Tuesday was a horrible day. The weather had changed from brilliant sunshine to a fierce damp wind. Dubrovnik in fair weather is a fairyland town, but when it rains, and if there is an off-sea wind, it can become infinitely depressing and unattractive. I decided that since I could not paddle—bathing was out of the question in April; it was too cold—I would climb up to the great fortress tower outside the town walls and sit on the lee side of the rock. The wind was blowing almost at gale strength, and it was as much as I could do to clamber up the precipitous cliff to the shelter of the building which crowns the rock like a ship's bows built of stone. Perched at the top, I drew this picture.

On the way back to the hotel in the afternoon it poured in torrents, and I decided to go to the pictures at the Tonkino. At first sight the word looks like a trade name for a brand of Chinese tea,

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE



but Tonkino really means Talkie in Serbian. They were showing that morbid hospital film, *Men in White*, and a news film that was two months old. I sat next to a boy with St. Vitus' Dance, who made most curious gruntings and whistlings all through the performance. Occasionally he stuck his thumbs in his ears and scratched his head with the other fingers. He was often more entertaining than the films.

I went back to the hotel feeling very ill, with a raging headache, and went straight to bed, wondering how on earth I should ever manage to get up in time the next morning. It was silly of me to have sat about in that hurricane. My head swam and my throat burned like fire. Something was very obviously wrong, and it was my fault—it always is.

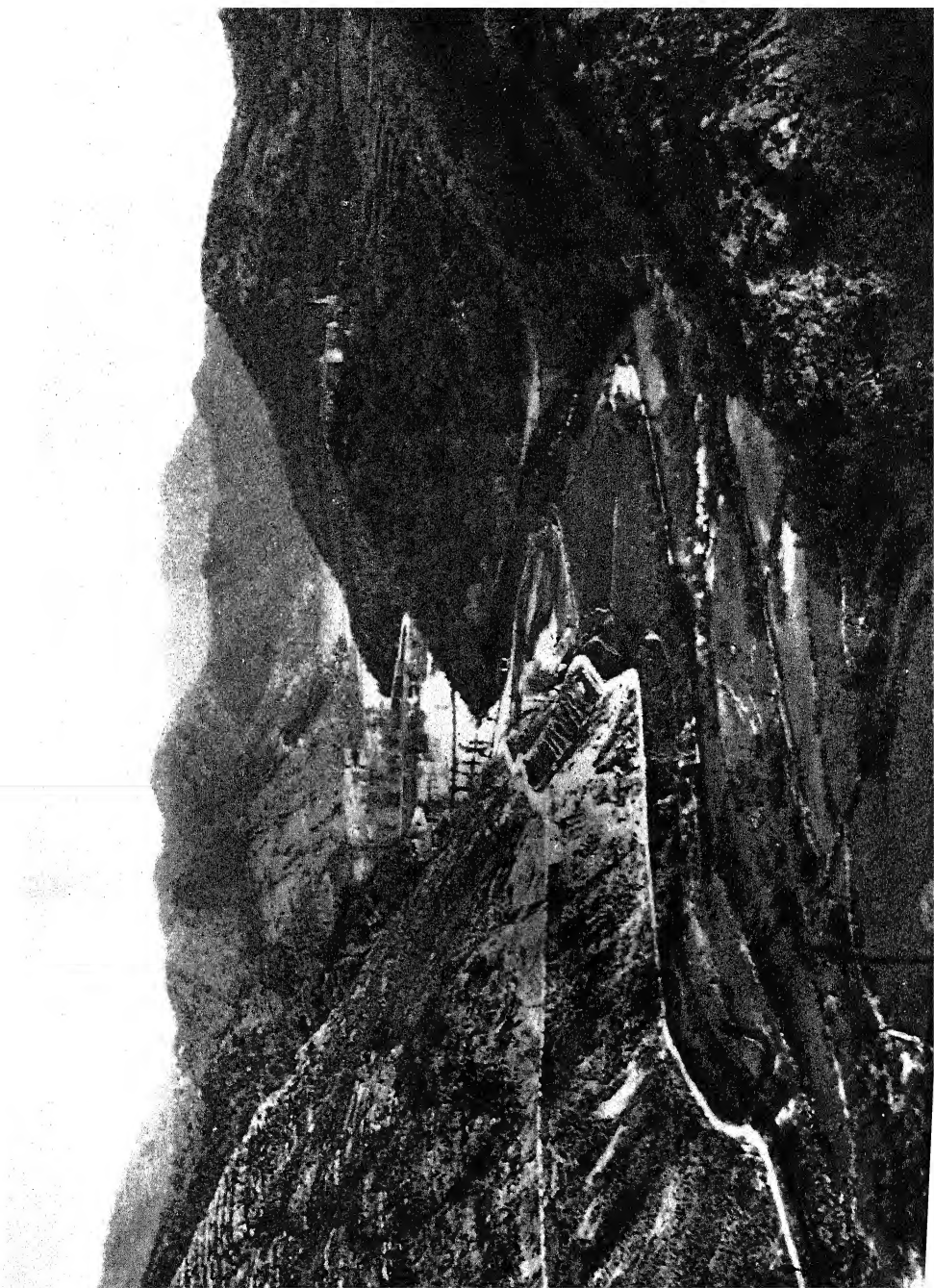
The next morning they came and called me at 5.30. I could barely manage to put on my shirt, I

felt so weak. The bus journey was clearly out of the question, so the porter sent the taxi away with a message to the agency saying I was ill. I returned to bed and found my temperature well over 102° . Despair like a great weight bore me down, for how on earth was I to meet Maud and John unless I got better—and what was wrong—and how was I to get better? After some aspirin and coffee I slept till 10. The temperature had gone down to 99° . I managed to get dressed and staggered downstairs. The porter phoned for a taxi, and I went to see the only doctor in Dubrovnik who speaks any English. He was a grave man and very silent. After taking my temperature with a thermometer of his own—as big and round as a man's forefinger—he announced that all idea of leaving Dubrovnik before Easter must be relinquished, that I must go straight to bed, and that he would call in the evening and see me.

"But what is wrong with me?"

"I have no idea—yet. We shall know in six hours. You must go to the chemist and obtain these tablets—of these tablets you shall take one every three hours, with a pint of hot water. The tablets are that you shall have much sweat. Now go and get to bed. At six of clock I shall come to see you. Good-day."

Armed with the tablets, I returned and explained what I was going to do to the porter, who seemed to understand perfectly, made no fuss nor appeared in the least surprised. He gave instructions for six blankets to be added to my bed, and for jugs of hot



water to be taken to me whenever I rang twice. At his suggestion I sent a warning telegram to Maud—"Just in case anything detains M'sieur." Doctor K.'s tablets had a very drastic effect, for, apart from making me "have much sweat," they gave me horrible delusions and depressions. But by three o'clock my temperature was normal and I felt very hungry. The next time I woke up Doctor K. was standing over me with his huge thermometer.

"And you feel better—yes?"

"Thank you—I do."

"Then you shall have a good drink of raw eggs with cognac."

"Now?"

"No—first I shall have a look at you."

He rolled me about in the bed and tapped my chest and back with a rubber hammer.

"Your condition has improved. You have escaped. You are a lucky man, Mr. Thornton."

"Good. But what have I escaped?"

"I'm not certain. Your spleen was enormously enlarged this morning. You might have had bronchial influenza; it is very prevalent here. Few recover. To-morrow, if you feel well, come and see me in the evening. Good-night."

He shook my hand and left.

Almost immediately the porter trotted in with a tray laden with a glass, two eggs, a bottle of cognac and jug of hot water. I was pleased to see him, and he seemed very pleased to see me.

"M'sieur looks like one risen from the grave. The doctor says he is very pleased with your progress."

"Yes, Gjorgje, he says I may get up to-morrow," I answered, as that worthy mixed a curious drink of raw eggs and brandy. When finished, it looked rather horrible, but tasted excellent.

The next day I really did feel like a man who had come back to life, though every movement was a great effort, and the ground swam underneath me as I walked down to the quay to catch the tram for my visit to Doctor K. He was not in, and I had to go to wait for him at the Bolnica.¹

The Bolnica of Dubrovnik is run by Nuns of a Nursing Order. They are wonderful women, always at the disposal of the sick. The hospital had a peaceful reassuring atmosphere, and I rather enjoyed waiting. A nun came in and disturbed my reverie. "Herr Docktor will see you now."

She led me down a long corridor to Doctor K.'s consulting room. He asked me a string of questions, grunted once or twice and said that I had made such an extraordinary recovery that the trip to Skoplije might be attempted if a private car were hired.

"No bus for you—you would die of exhaustion long before you got half-way."

"Can you suggest a place for me to find a car?" I said anxiously.

"This address will I give you; you shall find here a most safe and good driver. Good-bye. I wish you safe journey and *Sredan Uskers*—a happy Easter."

I paid him and left. Now for the car. Back in Gruž I found the man whom the doctor had recommended.

¹ Hospital.

It took some time to unearth him, for he was busy looking at a machine at the other end of the village.

We sat down to coffee whilst I outlined my plan and the reasons for wanting to go by car. He spoke fluent English, if somewhat Americanised in construction. Neither of us mentioned a price. He was summing me up and deciding just how much I would stand for. I was watching his moustache twitch as he calculated the mileage and petrol bill.

It was a far longer journey than I had thought, and certainly far more unpleasant and dangerous than the bus agent had even hinted.

"We shall have to stay the night in Podgorica, I suppose," said I, during the calculations.

"Eh?"

He was still uncertain about my purse's depth.

"Eh? Stay the night in Podgorica? Where should we sleep—in the streets? There isn't a clean house in the entire town! No, we shall go either to Berane or Kolašin. We might even stay in Nicsić, where my mother lives."

"At the bus agency they said that——"

"The bus agency is run by idiots who doubtless have reasons for sending you to Podgorica to be robbed. No, we shall leave by seven-thirty tomorrow, stay the night at Kolašin, and from there we will try to get you to Kosovska Mitrovica in time to catch the evening train for Skoplije. I cannot promise you to arrive by then; but there is a clean hotel in Mitrovica."

"But I *must* arrive in Skoplje by Easter Day."

"That depends entirely on whether we are able to cross the Albanian Alps in one day. You have no idea of the road."

"No, I have not—obviously." He laughed and stroked his moustache. That stroking, had I but known it, meant, "I have fixed the price," for immediately afterwards he said, "And it will cost you four thousand dinars¹ to make the trip."

"Very well; but if we pick up passengers on the way, we shall deduct whatever they give you from the four thousand."

"As you say—it's O.K. by me. I shall come with rugs and other things for you to wear. In the mountains it is very cold. If anybody wants to come with us I shall take them?"

"Do you mean from there—or on the way?" I asked.

"Either. I will call my friends in Kotor; they may know of a tourist who wants to make the trip."

"Yes, by all means. Phone up and see. In the meantime, good-bye till to-morrow at seven-thirty." I wandered slowly back.

On the way to the hotel I wondered why I had consented to be stung for four thousand dinars, and why I had so glibly agreed to his price in the first place. But it was Hobson's Choice. I dare not miss Maud and John. Maud's remarks if I turned up two days late at Skoplje would have scorched the hair from my head. I bought a packet of Thermo-gene and some oranges for the journey.

¹ Sixteen pounds sterling.

The next morning I felt better than ever, and ate a huge meal of rolls and cheese before Nicolai Petrović arrived with his car. Just as we were about to move off from the front door of the hotel, one of the waiters came rushing up to the car with a bill for the brandy and eggs. But before he could present it, the manager tore it up, saying with much bowing and excusing, "We cannot think of asking M'sieur to pay for such a trifle; we can only hope M'sieur will honour us again with his delightful and august company." It was most flattering; but Nicolai's only comment was, "Eggs and brandy are very cheap here—and it always pays to advertise!" He was to provide some brilliant flashes of irony before the trip was finished. We moved off amid the fevered good-byes and "God speed you's" of the hotel staff.

The road from Dubrovnik to Kotor is excellent, and we made good progress as far as the ferry across the Kotor Bight. This ferry cuts off a great loop of road and saves a good hour's drive. On the other side of the water the road slowly deteriorates, becoming at times very rough. Nicolai explained to me as we climbed up the famous zigzag road to Cetinje that we were crossing the very ridge where the first guns were fired in 1914. "The Austrians had fortifications where they shelled us. We were quite defenceless, being unaware of what had happened in Sarajevo. You see, there was no telephone service then, and no wireless."

"Where were you when it happened?" I asked.

"I was at the court of the King of Montenegro.

He was a brave man. I was his chief chauffeur. When he heard what had happened he made me drive him immediately to this spot in his Napier car. I remember it as though it happened yesterday."

Deeply affected by his story, he remained silent for some time as we slowly climbed up the hundreds of bends in the road. The view of the Kotor Bight from the top is one of the wonders of the Balkans. You can see for forty miles in any direction if it is a clear day. Three thousand feet below, the shining waters stretch out like blue fingers stuck between the towering limestone mountains. The car stopped to cool off, for steam was clouding out of the carburettor. I asked Nicolai what the King of Montenegro did when he arrived on the scene.

"His first thoughts were for the women and children whom the Austrians were going to murder unless the Montenegrins opened up the road. But what could we do? They blinded most of the children and threw them over the cliff. But we had learnt some nice things to do back again." He chuckled and spat meditatively into the dust, and went on: "You see that great stretch of water? Well, the entire British Navy can hide in one of those inlets. When we fight again we can have as many ships as we like in the Kotor Bay."

We drove on in silence to Cetinje.

Cetinje used to be the capital of the kingdom of Montenegro. It is a rather naked-looking place to-day, littered with the ex-legations of all the European countries. Nicolai pointed out to me the very rooms he had occupied when he worked in

the royal palace. "The king was a good man, and a very clever man, too."

"Yes?"

"He wrote beautiful poetry and spoke several languages. I was one of the people who really knew him well. He had a very sad end. I was with him to the last."

"Where did he die?"

"On the Riviera; he had a villa built there. He was a fine old gentleman, over eighty. I think he died of a broken heart, myself. He had never known any serious illness."

One of the best buildings in Cetinje is the ex-Russian Legation. It is a huge rambling palace with neglected gardens full of weeds and the remnants of what used to be ornamental beds. The Lion and the Unicorn still gaze down defiantly from the stable doors of what was the British Legation. We lunched in Cetinje. Nicolai found a friend and sat with him at a separate table. It was Good Friday, so they ate huge helpings of boiled eel and shredded horseradish. I tried the eel, but found it rather rubbery—so asked the hotelkeeper to cook me an omelette instead. The atmosphere in Cetinje is very like the Pyrennes. Perhaps the Serbs will one day discover that they have a second Pau, only waiting to be given good hotels and passable roads to become an excellent tourist centre for Montenegro.

From Cetinje to Podgorica the road winds down and down to the very edge of the Shkoder Lake. The country we passed through was more barren

and desolate than anything I saw in Morocco. Devoid of any vestige of vegetation and hideously ugly. I remarked on this to Nicolai, who quietly replied, "You are a foreigner. You don't understand why we should fight and shed our blood for what you think is a waste of rocks. But I tell you that every Montenegrin worth his salt would willingly have died to save the independence of his country. I tell you that when I was a boy, and the Turks came up in thousands from Üsküb,¹ there were men and women who never tasted bread for eight months at a stretch."

"Why, what were they up to?"

"Fighting—endlessly fighting. For weeks at a time. They had no time even to build themselves little ovens to cook a loaf of bread or a piece of meat."

"What else did they live on. They didn't eat their meat raw, I suppose?"

"No, they dried and salted it. They also caught fish from the streams and dried that too. The women looked after the men; often they died with them. My grandmother bore two children, and brought them up whilst fighting by her husband's side. Those were tough days, eh?"

"And the Turks never got through?" I asked.

"Never. If they did, we used to roast them alive, as a warning!"

Occasionally in the midst of all this wilderness

¹ Üsküb was the Turkish name for Skoplije, the present capital of Yugoslavija.



“ . . . BUT PERHAPS A FAR HAPPIER ONE THAN MOST OF US
LEAD. . . . ”

you find little hollows in the rocks full of growing crops. They look like emerald patches in the endless lines of grey hills. I saw a dozen peasant women filling their wickerwork baskets with dust and earth from the roadside. When they have a load they carry it for miles to some sheltered spot in the hills, where they start another garden in the wilderness of rock. They share the produce from their gardens on a strictly communal basis, every one taking according to their needs. It is a hard, almost cruel, life in its endless grind and fight for existence, but perhaps a far happier one than most of us lead in the big cities of Europe. In a country where there are no papers, banks, strikes or doctors you have little time to bother about politics. The next meal, and where it is going to come from—if at all—is the chief preoccupation.

Podgorica¹ is a depressing place. I realised as soon as I saw it why Nicolai had said there wasn't a clean house in the whole town. We drove through the filthy streets littered with offal and wisps of straw. The town is quite large, and may have looked beautiful during the days of Montenegro's independence, but to-day it is a very grim place. Malaria is plentiful, for the mosquitoes have no distance to fly from the swamps near the town. The only beautiful thing in Podgorica was a newly painted baby's cradle, drying off in the bright April sun. Nicolai was very disgusted with Podgorica. He said that it was rapidly going from bad to worse under the new administration, but that it was in

¹ Podgorica is pronounced Pód-gor-itza.

any case a place that was only pleasant in the cold weather. "And then the fleas go to sleep and the mosquitoes forget the road to the town." He enjoyed this remark, and spat again.

From Podgorica we climbed up again into the mountains called the Lijevo Rijeka. The immediate change in the atmosphere was very noticeable: it was damper and much fresher than when we had crossed to Podgorica. Snow shone on the distant mountains like pale-pink icing sugar. Tufts of thyme and minute red saxifrage grew by the roadside, and the ground was often covered for miles with shrubs and stunted pines. We passed a wagon drawn by a team of mules. It was laden with soldiers who were singing a slow hymn-like tune as they drove at a snail's pace up the rough road. Sticking out over the back of the wagon was a Christmas tree, and a dead sheep peered out with a sad, glazed expression.

"What is the tree for?" I asked Nicolai.

"To-morrow is Easter Eve. They will decorate the tree and have a party with their friends."

When we drew up level with the wagon he shouted a greeting to the men and asked them where they were going.

"To Mateševu to-night, and to-morrow to Kolašin."

"God go with you," bawled Nicolai, and drove on in a cloud of dust.

We reached Mateševu after an hour. It was a handful of wooden shacks perched on the side of a river, and gave an impression of being quite

uninhabited. Not even a small boy to run out and stare at the car.

"We need fresh water for the carburettor. Will you go and fill this bucket at the river, and I'll order some coffee at the Kafana?"

I was glad of an excuse to go down to the river and wash some of the dust from my nose and eyes. The current rushed past, taking with it stones and logs of wood in its pea-green waters. Whilst I was there, two little girls came up and showed me their dolls. I said good-afternoon to the dolls and gave each one a dinar for its mother. The mothers scampered off with brief thanks.

The river was in spate, swollen with the streams of ice water that pour down from the melting snows. I saw some men in the distance poling a raft of logs across the broken waters of a rapid; they were naked from the waist downwards, and kept falling into the river. The coffee we drank was most refreshing. It was made with river water. I paid the bill—only three dinars—and we drove off after shaking hands with everybody who lived in the Kafana.

The scenery became more and more like the Austrian Alps. No longer was the horizon bounded by naked limestone cliffs. It was a welcome relief, and very much cooler. We came to what at first appeared to be a blank wall of rock running straight across the road. Nicolai slowed up and, turning to me, said, "Now, Mr. Thornton, close your eyes—I have a surprise for you—and don't open them until I say, 'Open.'"

I did as he asked, and we moved off again.

The car swung round a sharp right-handed bend, and then without any warning to the left. I fell against Nicolai's shoulder as he swivelled the vehicle round the zigzag corners. "Don't you open those eyes—wait for one little minute."

"No, I won't open them," I answered, though I longed to see what was happening. The seconds of his little minute crawled by as we dropped down a very steep slope.

"Now open your eyes," said Nicolai with great ceremony, and stopped the car.

For a moment I thought I was the victim of an hallucination. The whole scenery was so different one could imagine that instead of having travelled a mere hundred yards from the wall of rock, one had been shot across a hundred miles in as many seconds. The mountains were black with pines and green with pasturage. Snow shone on the distant peaks, water ran from streams on the hills to feed the river as it rushed at the bottom of the valley. The houses that were dotted about on the forest edge were completely different from anything we had passed that day. They were made entirely of wood, even held together by wooden pegs in place of nails. I was struck dumb by the beauty of it as we drove down the valley.

"You would never have believed me if I said that this was waiting behind that bend in the road, would you?" asked Nicolai.

And I admitted that it was one of the most astonishing things I had ever experienced, this

coming out of a wilderness of rocks and barren wastes into a land that was full of trees and flowers. The animals walking about the green slopes of the mountains looked complacently back at me as we passed them. For miles we drove on along between those vast mountains, passing occasional water-mills, where the logs were cut up and split for tiles and house timbers. In thirty miles I saw only four people. We were coming slowly out of the valley to an open stretch of alluvial land formed by a great loop in the river's course. The road became very bad, worn away by the spring flood waters. There were holes in the surface at least two feet deep, and often we had to get out and pull large stones away from the front wheels. Progress was painful and slow, and a puncture did not help matters as the light was beginning to fade.

Nicolai had a great fear of driving at night—even though he knew every inch of the road. After traveling over the death traps that we had encountered that day his fear was easily understood, for a false move of the wheel would often have meant a sheer drop of three or four hundred feet. The tyre was cut by a jagged stone. Both the outer and inner tubes had a rip big enough to put in your hand. "I thought this was going to happen," was Nicolai's only comment as he put on a new wheel. I said nothing, for it was easy to see that he was very upset.

Two miles farther on he remarked that we were lucky to be the right side of the pass, and that it would be pitch dark by the time we reached Kolašin.

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

We took a left-hand fork where the road crossed the river. I must have fallen asleep, for I remember nothing till we crashed across another bridge just outside Kolašin. The noise when you cross one of these bridges is rather awe-inspiring, all the sleepers are loose, and make a noise like thunder as the car moves over them. When pieces of corrugated iron have also been used, the racket is reminiscent of *Ghost Train* effects.

CHAPTER SIX

KOLAŠIN is a small town of severe appearance, built entirely of wood. There are a few shops, a great many kafanas and a post office. It was quiet—almost deathly still—as we drove up to the main entrance of the town.

The streets, wide and bare, were lit with electric light. We drove up to the hotel, where Nicolai was well known, and unpacked the car. I was rather embarrassed by the attentions of the old man who repeatedly came into the bedroom to have a stare at me whilst I washed myself. Everything in the room was spotlessly clean. The floor was scrubbed smooth, and the yellow pine boards looked almost butter-coloured against the gay pieces of rag carpet that were placed by the two huge beds. Hanging on the wall by the side of the bed I decided to sleep on was a ferocious cross-stitched spaniel (or it may have been a lion) worked in magenta and emerald green on a mustard-coloured background. Each time I looked round at it as I moved about the room the dog seemed to glare with its bloodshot eyes and bare its fangs. The next morning, however, when I saw it by daylight the whole effect was changed; it looked a very docile and friendly dog, with its inane tail curled round like a piece of seaweed.

The bedding consisted of one enormous eider-down cum-quilt, which had for its under surface a

clean sheet buttoned on like a cover. The mattress was quite two feet thick, and packed tightly with hay. I could foresee certain complications with that eiderdown, as there was no way of keeping it on the bed. It was clearly not intended to tuck in. I sat down with my back to the dog and worked out how far we had come that day. My speculations were cut short by Nicolai's sudden entry to the room.

"How do you like this room. Nice and warm, eh—and clean?" he asked and stood in the doorway.

"Yes, it's a very pleasant surprise. Thank God I came with you and not with that bus company," I answered and pulled on my slippers.

"I guess the fleas and lice of Podgorica are feeling quite lonely to-night. I've come up to say that your supper is ready."

We went downstairs, passing on the way a young woman laden with hot bricks and bottles of boiling water to put in the beds. Who should be sitting by the stove but the old man. He was the aged father of the proprietress, and Nicolai addressed him as Gospodin Direktor.¹ She had lost her husband about a year before, and was still in deep mourning. Gospodin Direktor was rather a nuisance. We could not get rid of him. He stood and watched us like prize pigs at a fair. Nicolai said that he was nearly ninety years old and had to be humoured, so sent him off to see if he could find a special bottle of *raki* for us to sample. *Raki* is plum brandy. It tastes rather like furniture polish mixed with liquid fire. Sometimes it is called Slivovitza. Our

¹ Polite equivalent of "Mr. Manager."

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

meal was worth all the day's discomforts. Mountain trout grilled over the fire, boiled rice and pickled cabbage. There was no butter or fat of any sort in the house on account of the strict observance in which the Fast was kept. We ate ravenously, for, apart from our meal at noon, we had not seen food for twelve hours. After the fish came sour milk and



GOSPODIN DIREKTOR.

walnuts. Nicolai complained that I had not either eaten enough nor drunk sufficient raki.

"You will never be a strong man if you don't eat plenty when you get the chance. You English have mad ideas about wine. A man who does not drink wine can't have strong blood—that's what I always say," he managed to mumble out between his great mouthfuls of curds and walnuts. I suggested we should go for a stroll and find a Kafana

for a quiet cup of coffee before going to bed; besides, it would be a way of escaping Gospodin Direktor, who had seated himself where he could see us eating and overhear our conversation. He had never heard a word of English before: he did not want to miss anything.

We went to a Kafana a short way up the street, and almost as soon as we stepped within the door I heard a voice in English reading the Prayer of St. Chrysostom! Walking into the half darkness of a coffee-house in Kolašin to be greeted by somebody praying in English is an experience unlike anything one can describe in words. It was a Good Friday evening broadcast from London. There were half a dozen men quietly talking and drinking their coffee and *raki* in that stuffy little room, none paying the slightest attention to the voice bleating away from the loud speaker hung on the wall. The coffee was good. I drank seven cups. This pleased the proprietor, who came and sat down at our table. He had worked for sixteen years in Chicago, and said he always listened to English religious services because he liked the singing, and told us, "It reminds me of the Salvation Army services 'way back in the States."

We left the Kafana just as the Archbishop of Canterbury was finishing a sermon, and walked back to bed.

My misgivings about that eiderdown thing were soon substantiated. No sooner had I got on the bed and draped the thing over me than it mysteriously wormed its way off and fell on the floor.

After putting on two pairs of stockings by way of keeping my feet warm, and pinning the cover to the mattress with safety-pins, I managed to get to sleep.

At the bottom of the small garden behind the hotel was a neatly built shed with a door-knocker and a little window. Painted on the door was the mystic symbol OO.

The next morning I found myself confronted with visiting this shed. To get to it one had to go through the side of the kitchen and out of the back door. Naturally everybody knew where I was going. No sooner was I in the garden than the youngest daughter—aged ten—was sent after me with a pile of newspapers and a twin candlestick. She walked behind me at a discreet distance, but as soon as we reached the shed, darted forward and with a little curtsey threw open the door. She lit the candles and placed them on a bracket just inside the door and stationed herself outside till I should appear. The sanitary apparatus within the shed was extremely primitive, but quite wholesome. On the return journey the little girl explained that ever since one of their hotel guests fell backwards into the *nušnik*—a drop of some yards—her mother always sent her to see that everything went smoothly. "We had to get ropes and poles to drag him out, and when at last he appeared all his clothes had to be thrown away. My mother was angry with me because I laughed so much—I could not help," she added.

"I should have laughed, too," I answered as we reached the hotel.

We started off at seven-thirty after a scanty meal of dry bread and coffee. The coffee was unfortunately made with milk. It is fatal to ask for white coffee in the Balkans. The result of such a request is a filthy-looking mess with greenish globules of mutton fat floating amid the coffee grounds on the top of the brew. Before we left Gospodin Direktor came forward with a dish of Easter Eggs and offered them to me with the solemn greeting: "*Khristos Voscresé.*"¹ I chose one dyed red and green. It was beautifully decorated with flowers and animals drawn all over the shell, and circled with the Easter greeting written in Cyrillic script. A crowd of small boys came and watched each package being placed in the car and chattered like jays when I turned the camera on them.

I was sorry to leave Kolašin. It would have been a happy place to spend a few idle days. But Maud and John would be waiting for me that night at Skoplije, so I resolved that one day I would return and explore the valley. The morning air was keen and brisk, rather like early November in England. Nicolai had warned me that we were to cross to-day the most dangerous parts of the road, some of them at an altitude of seven thousand feet. For the first three hours we made very slow progress, climbing and dropping over endless foothills towards our goal, the towering heights of Komitor.

The scenery was wild and uninhabited. For many miles the only signs of human occupation were the piles of felled logs which had been washed down

¹ "Christ is Risen."



from the forests above. In forty miles we passed through one town—Andrevice¹—a dismal main street of poor wooden shacks pinned to the sheer side of the hill.

The presence of abundant water and the healthy atmosphere of the mountains seem to safeguard the people of Andrevice against the squalor and dirt you meet in the lowland agricultural towns. Just outside Andrevice, Nicolai decided to pull up and visit a friend of his who had a Kafana by the road. We got out and walked down a lane by the river. The Kafana was really a hotel where people came and stayed when they fished the river. The friend was an enormous man who spoke English.

He was nearly seven feet tall, like the kind sort of giant who does not eat little children or rob wayfarers. We ate some walnuts and new bread. Both tasted strongly of garlic. I was given a visitor's book to sign, and the Giant friend told a complicated funny story (at which I laughed but never understood) about some tourists who got lost in the mountains. The narrator's English was almost impossible to understand, even though he had spent twelve years as a child in America. One begins to realise what countless thousands of aliens must have emigrated to the States, and how strong the ties of their fatherland must be to drag them back to the complete isolation of a place like Andrevice. Love of the ancestral hearth must be fierce to make them forsake the big city's lights and possibilities of comfort and prosperity.

¹ An-dray-vitza.

Perhaps the boot is on the other foot. The emigrants who have returned to their remote villages and towns may have loathed and even hated the sophistication of our so-called civilised world. The day comes when you have to choose between the advantages of wood alcohol, steam heating or false teeth and the everlasting fight for existence that living in these remote countries will inevitably demand. Nothing maddens me more than to hear some intellectual philosophise about the beauties of peasant life.

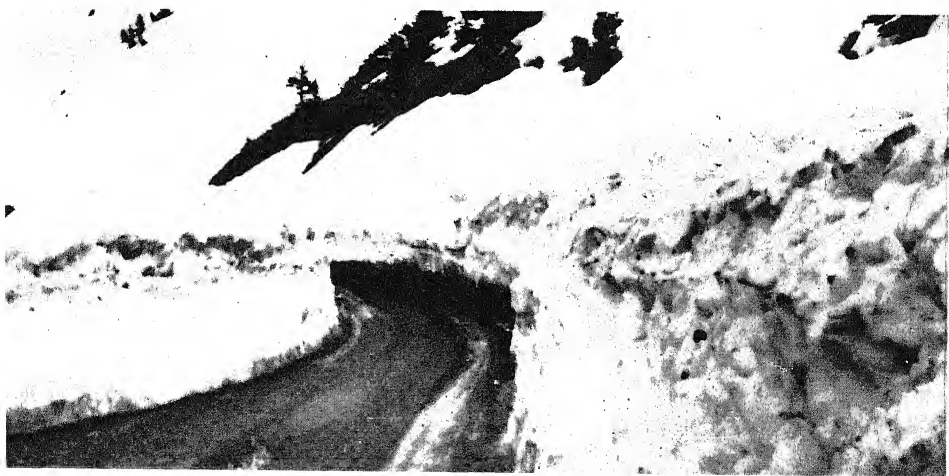
Arty-crafty people who dress in homespun cloth and eat from hideous hand-made pottery, should have a glimpse of the bitter drudgery that is the real background of peasant life: bearing babies from the age of sixteen until you are a haggard old woman at forty, fighting starvation from the door year after year, working from dawn to sunset and paying taxes that you never understand. Yet, in spite of all this sordidness, these women have kept a gaiety and a love of friendship that are far more precious than spurious education.

After our brief halt at Andrevica we decided not to stop again until we arrived at Peć, on the other side of the mountains. The road now became an endless serpentine track, running in and out along the precipitous side of the valleys. We made very good progress at an average speed of 15 m.p.h. The surface of the road, when one considers the climate and situation, was not bad, but there were moments when a false move of the steering wheel would have



"A DISMAL STREET OF POOR WOODEN SHACKS."

"WALLS OF HARDENED SNOW SIXTEEN FEET THICK."



meant sudden death. No protective walling keeps you from falling over if you run the car too near the edge, and an average drop of 500 feet awaits the careless driver. Half-way up the first range of mountains we met a line of six soldiers. They warned us that there was a gale blowing at the top of Koprivnik, and asked whether we had met their friends, who were making for Kolašin.

While we toiled up that seemingly everlasting road I could hear the incessant trickle of little streams that flowed down from the melting snows on the lower slopes. These streams reduce the ground to a morass of mud and gravel, ready to subside at any moment. All around us the mountains towered up into the fast clouding sky. Albania lay only fifteen miles away behind the Prokletije Range, and in front of us stood Koprivnik like a silent guard, barring the way with 8,000 feet of snow and unknown dangers.

The air became bitterly cold, and when the car swung round towards the last lap of the upward journey we saw clouds of snow and ice-fragments blowing about at the summit. Without any warning a mass of ice as big as a church detached itself and rushed madly down the side of the mountain. The road where we were travelling had high walls of hardened snow sixteen feet thick, but for this protection we should have been blown over several times. The car struggled on with the back wheels flying round madly on the glassy surface of the road. The wind blew mercilessly and cut like a knife, bringing down occasional swirls of

driven snow on to the hood. I got out and threw sacks under the wheels as we made painful progress to the top. After the sacks had been thrown down a dozen times they froze to my hands—hard, like door-mats—and became useless. To make matters worse, a drift of fresh snow slithered down from the high walls and filled the roadway. By dint of shovelling the fresh snow under the wheels and mixing in the frozen sacks, we managed to get the machine moving again.

I was more than relieved to get out on the open top of the pass where a Government rest-house or lookout station was buried up to the eaves in snow. Nicolai drove the car out of the wind and got down to stamp some circulation back to his feet. Wonderful and terrible was the sight at the top of the Tcaker Pass. Mile upon mile of mountains, some dark green, some copper coloured, and others pure shimmering white. Ninety miles away the shadowy pink forms of the Šar Planina stretch out into what seems eternity. Lying below you see the tortuous road you have recently scaled. It looks like a thin, white line traced in the dark green of the pine forests. The soldiers whom we had passed were walking like six ants along this white line a thousand feet below.

I tried to film part of the view from the summit, but the camera was blown out of my hands. It came to no harm as it buried itself a good two feet into the snow. By crouching down behind Nicolai I managed to take a panoramic view in sections. We raced back to the car to get warm again, and

set off down the Tcaker Pass to Peć.¹ The road was considerably easier, and we soon left the snow far behind and entered the pine forests that clothe the lower slopes.

In many places these forests have been cleared for timber. Whenever we came to such a spot Nicolai would slow up, gaze very fixedly at the clearings and mutter to himself. He was very upset, and explained, "Very sad to see all that lovely trees cut down. When I drove through these mountains with the dear Queen and the little ones, there was just one great black carpet of pines as far as you can see." He hated progress when it meant cutting down these beautiful pines.

The drop down to Peć is far more sudden than that endless climb up from Kolašin, and the last twenty miles of the journey run through the Bistrica Gorge, carved out by a river that is fed on every side by melting snow. It was through this pass that the Serbian Army retreated to the coast in 1916, losing thousands of men in the effort of scaling the precipitous sides of the pass.

"They died like flies: no food, no doctors, no clothes. It was a terrible time for us. I helped to bury the bodies of some of my friends. Many of the men were too weak to march any farther, and just fell over the side of the road—like dead sheep." Nicolai wiped his eyes with the back of a hairy hand and stuffed a piece of bread into his mouth.

We passed little groups of men and women walking into Peć for their Easter shopping. Many

¹ Pronounced Paytch.

of these were Albanians, wearing the dress of their particular district. "Only another twenty minutes," said Nicolai. "Hungry?"

"Yes, I am," I replied with such conviction that he laughed and cheered up. Ever since those wretched clearings in the forest he had been gloomy and silent.

Peć bursts on you without any warning. The Gorge ends abruptly with several tunnels through the rock, and the car came into the dazzling sunlight, confronted with the untidy squalor of Peć. It was stuffy and very dusty.

The streets were crammed tight with people all shouting and jostling. We appointed two ruffianly boys to guard the car and went off to eat in the one and only hotel. I was devoutly thankful that I was not alone in Peć—it gave me an overwhelming feeling of fear. The utter remoteness of the place was increased by the decayed and ramshackle appearance of everything one saw. Perhaps it was partly the atmosphere that depressed me. I longed to get away. We had taken seven hours to reach Peć.

Whilst Nicolai went off to a garage to make certain inquiries, I wandered off into the market to look for a pair of peasant-made shoes. I was expecting to dance most of the next day, and had nothing suitable for the occasion. After fighting my way through a dense crowd I found the bazaar. Past experience is a valuable guide on these occasions. Never talk about prices; never appear too interested; never enthuse over the goods. I found an old wizened woman who had two pairs that she had

made herself from rawhide and string. They were exactly what I wanted. We agreed on 30 dinars as a fair price, and I turned to go. But such is the novelty of a stranger who can speak and make himself agreeable in a few words of a foreign tongue that a small escort of other shoppers attached themselves to me and asked all sorts of questions that I found it very difficult to answer sensibly. Who was I—why was I in Peć—what country did I live in—why was I buying peasant-made shoes—would I like to buy a nice ewe lamb for Easter—had I any gold coins—and so on, until I reached the hotel. Here I made a farewell speech, much to Nicolai's amusement, and we drove off in a cloud of yellow dust.

The journey from Peć to Kosovska Mitrovica is a nightmare. The roads are simply tracks across the alluvial plain of brown earth. I imagine that in wet weather the journey must be virtually impossible, except in a tank or a lorry with caterpillar wheels. Not only is this journey extremely unpleasant, but also boring. Nothing of interest to see—just endless miles of undulating earth, rather like Leicestershire round Rugby. At one time not so long ago,¹ this journey was even more unpleasant, since bandits lived in the oak forests on either side of the road. They always made a thorough job of their robberies, taking every stitch of clothing from the victims who fell into their hands.

Whenever there was a long, open stretch of road

¹ Official reports say banditry stopped in 1925—but it was prevalent as late as 1929.

it was almost impossible to let the engine out, as the clouds of dust became so dense that visibility was reduced to ten yards. Moreover, breathing this heavy yellow air for any length of time started violent nose-bleeding. Tying a handkerchief over my face, I sat back and closed my eyes against the dust. As we plunged and bumped along, vivid, disjointed pictures flashed into my mind.

First that tragic Serbian army marching across the Kossovo Plains to meet the Bulgars, who were ten times as great in numbers. The War Savings notice in the village post office at home. I was a little boy, gazing up at a picture of a handful of silver coins that dripped down into a helmet and became bullets.

“PAY YOUR 5/- FOR THIS AND HELP
CRUSH THE GERMANS—
TURN YOUR MONEY INTO SILVER BULLETS”

I heard the voices of those beaten, terrified men and women who had fled in refuge up the Gorge of the Bistrica. Strange to think that we had travelled in a few hours from Podgorica to Peć—a journey that had taken eleven days when the English detachment had struggled across on December 2nd, 1915. Fifty-three men arrived alive; the rest died on the way. And there was the quick movement of Nicolai's hand as he brushed the tears from his eyes when he described the horrors of that winter. I remembered the woman at our little school who, on account of the War, taught me to write German

with a small g, and the little girls playing by the river at Mateševo who had shown me their dolls.

And thus it went on—a string of associations stirred by the innumerable sights and sounds of that journey from Dubrovnik. In a few minutes I was to part from Nicolai. Perhaps we should never meet again. I felt weak and very tired. We drove on relentlessly into the dusk.

On arrival at Mitrovica the luggage was deposited at the station, and we went back to the town for food. My chief need was water to wash some of the dirt from my face and hands. Nicolai had a great friend in Mitrovica who owned one of the big hotels, so we went there. The friend's name was Gjorgje. He was a mountainous man, very jolly and obliging. I drank tea and ate several slices of bread and sickly jam. Gjorgje sat by me and asked a lot of questions, mostly about the political situation in England and the gold reserves of the Bank of England. We spoke a mixture of English, French and Serbian. I must have told him some fantastic things without knowing it, for he called certain friends to hear my enlightened conversation.

Whenever he smiled he showed not only a top set but also a complete bottom set of metal teeth. To add to this effect the teeth were of different metals: some were ordinary gold ones and others looked like tarnished silver. Had I watched him smiling for long I should have become hypnotised by the lights that twinkled wickedly between his thick lips whenever he spoke or laughed his great garlicy laugh.

The Trepća mines are just outside Kosovska Mitrovica; they are run by Englishmen. Gjorgje had a high opinion of these foreigners, and said they were honest and good workers. Before I left for the station a large rectangular tin was produced and placed on the table. It was a collecting-box for some obscure charity that Gjorgje appeared to patronise. There was a lot of muffled conversation between him and a military official, and I was asked if I would care to "put something in the box for the Orphans and Widows Fund."

"Why, yes, of course. It is a great pleasure," I answered, and put in a few dinars.

The effect of my action was extraordinary. Gjorgje took me by the hand and warmly thanked me in the name of the Society, and the Military Prefect, who was sitting at the table, adding as he did so: "I knew that if you were really English you would put money in the box."

The Military Prefect also shook hands with me, and agreed with all that had been said in praise of the English. I was more scared than flattered, because I knew that there was some other quite different reason why they had been discussing the collecting-box stunt.

Nicolai was busy organising a carload of people for the return journey as far as Peć. I said good-bye to him and walked through the busy streets to the station.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A PORTER put my bags on board the Skoplije train, and I found myself sitting in a compartment with a very fat man in a tight grey suit. He was a Jew. I went to sleep, and was awoken by an armed gendarme who demanded not only my passport, but also full particulars and where I was going, whence I had come, and where I intended to stay in Skoplije. My answers were so confused that he went off and fetched a man who was the French master at the gymnasium at Bitolj, and said he spoke good English. I told him fairly roundly what I thought of the police in Jugoslavija, adding that I was to be the guest of the Municipality of Skoplije. This he conveyed to the attendant gendarme, who wrote it all down in a book. "But *why* was I going to Skoplije at all—what reasons could I give for ever wanting to go there?" asked the French master, obedient to the gendarme's demands.

"Because I am invited to make a film of the Easter Dances, and because I have specially come at the express desire of the Press Bureau at Belgrad," I answered.

This was also noted in the book. At last the gendarme was sufficiently informed of my movements to mark my passport and hand it back. The French master then gave me his visiting card, and we became very friendly. During the whole of

this time the fat Jew in the grey suit had been eating sandwiches of garlic sausage and hard-boiled eggs. After nearly five hours in the train I arrived at Skoplije and walked to the hotel where I hoped to find Maud and John. They were on the point of going to a Midnight Service at an Orthodox Church, and pressed me to join them. I explained that I had just made a forced march to meet them and felt rather tired, and added that I had been to church a lot already. However, I drank some coffee and several brandies, and off we started. I had arrived at that pitch of exhaustion when, instead of getting more tired, you start to get fresh energy.

We crossed the Vardar Bridge and found not only the church, but the surrounding patio already crammed with people. Maud was determined to see what was going on inside, so we forced our way into the church, which was thronged with noisy but very devout people. Every one was lighting long, slender candles and placing them by various Ikons. We bought a supply of candles and started lighting them; but at that moment two vergers came through the screen that shuts the sanctuary from the nave, and asked everybody to put out all the lights, as it was only two minutes before midnight. Maud said she wanted to go outside again and see the procession of the Holy Fire, which would be kindled by the Bishop and taken out to the awaiting throngs.

This is one of the most impressive and yet simple rituals of the Orthodox Church. Each Easter

Eve at midnight the Holy Fire is carried round the church thrice, and all the congregation light their candles and tapers and kiss their neighbours, saying, "Christ is risen." To which greeting one answers, "He is risen indeed."

In spite of my greatcoat I felt cold standing about outside waiting for the Bishop to come out. At last he came at the end of a procession of chanting priests and deacons. They nearly all wore their hair long and flowing round their shoulders, but a few of the younger ones had it cropped in a neat shingle. John said the Bishop's eyes frightened him. They were like points of black light, and seemed to move about in his head like eyes behind a mask. A woman next door to me had her back hair set on fire by a little boy who would insist on getting a fresh light for his three-foot candle every time the procession came past.

It was a ghostly ceremony. The vast crowd stood silently praying. Apart from the chanting, you heard nothing except the muffled tread of the procession. Then a bell rang announcing midnight. The procession disappeared into the West Door of the church, and a choir sang a hymn, the crowd joining in one by one until everybody was singing fervently.

But as soon as that hymn had finished the fun started. First you kissed the members of your own family and personal friends, then you kissed anybody you felt drawn to salute. The lady with the singed back hair kissed me, and I kissed her son and two daughters, and an officer in uniform kissed the

daughters and then me. After that I went home and left John and Maud to carry on. After all, they were not so tired as I was, and would probably feel freer if they knew I was not watching. On the way back I met little groups of people wandering home. We greeted each other and passed on.

The next morning was a pleasant rest after the feverish activity of the preceding week. Church bells woke me, but I dozed on in my warm, comfortable bed till John came charging in to announce that it was nearly ten, and he was going to have breakfast with Maud. When I eventually dressed I found them sitting in the sun, deep in conversation with a mousey, timid-looking man called Bukutza, who had come to make the arrangements for our transport to the villages. I did not like him. He looked stupid and fussy, and turned out to be unreliable as well. Maud did all the talking, which appeared to flatter Bukutza. He beamed behind his dirty glasses and rubbed his flabby hands together in a half-nervous, half-excited manner. Nevertheless he arranged for us to have a car at the expense of the Press Bureau, so we were all very grateful.

We spent the rest of the morning wandering about Skoplije, which is sharply divided by the Vardar River into New Skoplije and the Grad of old Skoplije. The Turks called the place Üsküb, and used it as their general H.Q. for the administration of Western Macedonia. There was a time when well over sixty per cent of the inhabitants of Skoplije were Moslems, and although great numbers of them have emigrated to Anatolia, the Turkish

atmosphere still hangs heavily in the streets of the old towns. Signs are written up in Arabic script, and Mosques of every shape and size—some derelict—can be seen in almost every street. The Jews have largely taken over from the Turks, and their quarter boasts an imposing synagogue and school. At the top of the Grad is a subterranean Orthodox Church built by the persecuted Christians six centuries ago, in such a manner that it is impossible to detect the church from the street outside. All you see is a blank wall with crumbling plaster that drops off each time anybody closes the door with a bang.

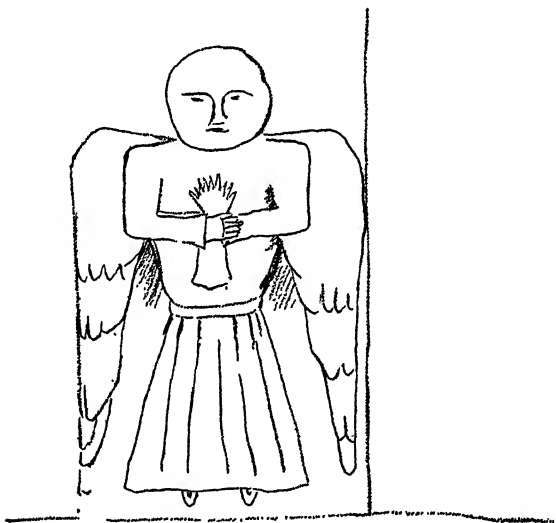
Inside it is dark and smelly. The entire church is decorated with carved oak. Some of the carvings are clever and beautiful, but it has made the interior rather gloomy. Evidently the Bulgars thought the same as I did, for when they were in occupation they started to gild the carvings in order to brighten things up a little. They only tried out their idea on a small area of the woodwork, as they were doubtless too busy fighting to spend time in finishing the job. All the people who have written about this church deplore this Bulgar "vandalism," which is the only colourful spot in the gloomy interior.

In the graveyard outside is by far the most entertaining part of the building. There is a row of neatly kept tombs of Patriarchs and Abbots. One of these graves has a headstone, guarded on each side by two pugnacious cretinoid angels with stunted wings. Each of these apparitions has its head closely cropped, and clutches a posy to its manly chest.

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

Perhaps the Slavonic heaven is peopled with such Cherubim.

After lunch we were met at the hotel by a Gospodin Stanovic and his wife, who were to take us to the villages around Skoplije to see the dancing. The car provided by the Municipality was powerful but a trifle small, four sat behind and two in front.



ONE OF THE CHERUBIM.

Everybody talked at once in their own language. We were all so pleased to see each other and had so much to say. When this first fine burst of Serbo-English goodwill had subsided, I asked Stanovic what we were going to see. He spoke good French, and though his wife could only understand a few words of that language she had a very alert mind, and could nearly always follow our conversation in the main details.

The road rapidly faded out into an earth track that ran quite haphazardly over ploughed fields, down precipitous banks, and across shallow streams. I was so terrified of the car tipping over, that on one occasion I got out whilst the chauffeur ran the machine backwards over a six-foot bank. The others sat talking and laughing, heedless of my precautions. The jolt, when the car reached the ground, threw them in a heap on the floor. After crossing two more ploughed fields on foot, and a dozen yards of swampy mud, we reached the dancing pitch of the first village. Maud was quite overcome with excitement, for never had she seen this type of dancing in its natural setting. I prepared the cinematograph and took a few shots of the crowd. A *gaida* player was providing the music on his pipes; he wore dark-tinted glasses which looked rather incongruous with the rest of his peasant clothes. John lost no time in starting one of his famous "conversations" with the men in the crowd. They showered questions on him, and he answered them in English. Some minutes later he was dancing in the men's Kolo.

The Southern Serbs—or Macedonians—dance their Kolo with the men and women in quite separate units. This is evidently one of the indelible influences of Turkish domination, for although they are Christians they have absorbed the Moslem idea of keeping the sexes apart. At first sight, when you see the chain of women moving very quietly all by themselves, and the men in their chain doing the most vigorous steps and capers in another part of the

pitch, it gives the impression that they are doing two completely different dances. But they are really dancing to the same music, and the men are moving in double time throughout.

The general atmosphere was rather rowdy, and lacked what Stanovic called organised communal dancing, so we went on to another much smaller place farther south.

No sooner had we driven into Rušhuk, than several young men came rushing up to the car and welcomed us as if we were members of their own family. Madame Stanovic told me that she and her husband had known the peasants of this village intimately for many years, and that together they had spent much time writing down their dances and the songs.

We were introduced to the M.C., one of the most beautiful and perfectly formed men I have ever seen. He had a gentle smile, and his name was Peter.

Ruštuk was only a quarter of the size of the last village, and the standard of the dancing was by far the highest I have seen in Serbian Macedonia. I took a number of excellent shots from various angles, and then went into the chain to learn a few new steps. Compared with the complexities met in Albanian dancing the footwork and rhythms were simple, but the speed at which some of the Kolos were taken made the performance wildly exciting. Stanovic and Maud sat on a bench with the Elders of the village. They chatted about the work I was doing, and asked strings of questions about



AT RUŠTUK.

English politics. All the Serbs are born politicians, they know more about what is happening in Europe than most Cabinet Ministers.

Madame Stanovic came and danced next to me. She was much respected in the village, and the peasants did everything she suggested in the way of showing me different dances as possible material for the film. I admired the genuine fervour of enjoyment that she showed, it was without a doubt the characteristic that made her popular with the villagers. The line drawn between the peasant and the educated classes in the Balkans is very slender, for they have not had the century of industrialism that has cut off the English office-worker from his brother working behind the plough. But for their education the town-dweller and the peasant are of one stock and one common interest. They dance together, they know each other's family gossip, and in death they often share the same graveyard.

The setting of that dance ground at Ruštuk was ideal. The pitch was on the side of a hill, and had been roughly levelled so that there was a steep bank on one side for the spectators, and a drop that ran down towards the gradient. In front of us stood the church, a white building surrounded by a garden and a few wooden crosses. Far away to the south glistened the silver hills capped with snow, Skoplije with its minarets lay below on the green and brown chequered plain. As the sun went down the crowd of women onlookers melted away, for there was water to draw and the evening meal to prepare. We had been dancing for over three hours without more than

a few minutes break. I asked for a drink of water, but Peter shouted to a friend to bring a pitcher of wine.

The dancing was over. Blissfully happy, with my trousers covered in dust, and a thirst that burned like a furnace, I sat down on the bench with Maud and the Elders.

"That was a wonderful experience," I said.

"Yes," agreed Maud. "It all seems like a lovely family party, I have never felt so much at home in any foreign country."

The wine arrived, and with it a large bowl of Easter Eggs. I had not counted on having to eat eggs on an empty stomach. With that impulsive generosity that typifies the actions of the poor, those simple laughing men forced us to fill our pockets with the eggs and plied us with the wine. They even put eggs into Maud's hat, and when I refused to take another, and leant over to pick up my own hat before that too was filled, somebody seized the opportunity to drop an egg in between my shirt and bare back. Stanovic became very jolly, and knocked back several glasses of wine, saying with solemn pleasure and crossing himself before each fresh draught, "*Khristos Voscresé*"—"Christ is Risen."

We must have looked a wonderful sight standing there peeling eggs, drinking wine, and laughing at each other's absurdities. I felt in all my pockets for a handkerchief, but everywhere my fingers encountered eggs. Saying "Good-bye" was a protracted and touching ceremonial, we could not drag ourselves away from the scene, even when we had

tumbled back into the car. The impassive chauffeur started up the engine and amid fervid cries of "*Zbôgom Zbôgom—Strechan put!*" we moved off back to Skoplije. "God go with you and a happy journey," they cried, and waved to us in the falling dusk that lit their kindly faces with a golden light.

On the way back to the hotel we thanked the Stanovic escort for their great kindness in having arranged such a happy afternoon. Our international feelings were glowing with bonhomie and good spirits. Stanovic was as loud in his praise of the English, as we had been in our appreciation of Macedonian hospitality. He said that he had served with English troops in the Salonica campaign, and promptly sang us a curious (quasi-English) version of "It's a long long way to Tipperary." We all sang; even Maud volunteered an Appalachian Folk Song. Before I realised what was happening we had reached the spot in the road where I had insisted on getting out. It was too late to bother now. I clung to the door and screwed up my eyes. The car lurched over the bank and down the drop. Only a miracle of God prevented that machine from turning right over. The singing at the back still continued, so I concluded I was being rather silly. But I had been in a fatal crash on the Brighton road only two months before leaving England, and it had somewhat shaken up my nerves.

We took leave of Gospodin Stanovic and his lady at the hotel, but not before they had our promise that we would call in at noon the next day for cakes and wine.

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE



TWO DANCERS AT RUŠTUK.

Staying at the hotel was a certain tourist whom the local papers described as a "prominent English woman of letters." She, too, was in Yugoslavia at the express wish of the Press Bureau, and was being

conducted round the various monasteries by a villainous-looking man who scarcely ever let her out of his sight. Some months later I learned in Belgrad that she had been specially sent out from England to write a book on these religious foundations. As for the thug escort, who appeared to have lost his shaving tackle, he turned out to be Monsieur Vinaver, the brilliant head of the Press Bureau. When we subsequently met him, I told him of the impression he had made on me in Skoplije, and he shouted with good-humoured laughter.

The next day we made our state visit to the Stanovic house. It was a very long way from the hotel, or at least what seemed to be, and the sun beat down with a midday fierceness. They were pleased to see us, and inquired if we felt tired after the exertions of the day before. Jam was served, and with it white wine. When I say jam was served, I mean that we were offered a pot of preserved cherries each, and ate a spoonful of the compôte. Then came plates of little cakes made of marzipan, chocolate and spiced almonds. I have a weakness for these things, and ate a great many. Madame Stanovic was delighted to see the plates emptying slowly under the united attacks made by John and myself. Maud made a great show of eating, but only consumed two. She may have put a few in her bag—I never inquired.

We arranged to meet as before, and drive out to some villages situated some seven miles south of Ruštuk, so as soon as propriety would permit we begged our leave and went back for lunch. By

the time we had walked back I began to feel the effect of the cakes on my appetite and digestion.

The journey to these new villages was quite placid compared with the experiences of the cross-country expedition of the previous day. We arrived to find the dances in full swing.

Although only seven miles south-west of Ruštuk village, these new villages of Kučevište and Bardovce were populated by people wearing completely different clothes. The women's dress was a heavy linen frock thickly embroidered on the sleeves and round the bottom, but embroidered entirely in black. No vestige of colour have they worked into their decorative patterns. Not only were the frocks of sombre hue, but the head scarf was draped in a hideous way, and held on with a strap of gold coins that ran under the chin and across the top of the wearer's head. The men at Ruštuk had worn two-foot wide belts of fine-woven red wool, with gay embroideries and edgings of lace at the end. But here the men had five or six yards of brown webbing wound round them.

Everything was on a bigger scale. There were hundreds of people at Kučevište, and many of them wore cheap European boots or caps if they were men, and high-heeled shoes and Woolworthian stockings if their husbands could afford to buy them. The dancing lacked the natural solemnity and order that I had rather expected. It was impossible to get any material for the films so we went on to the next village.

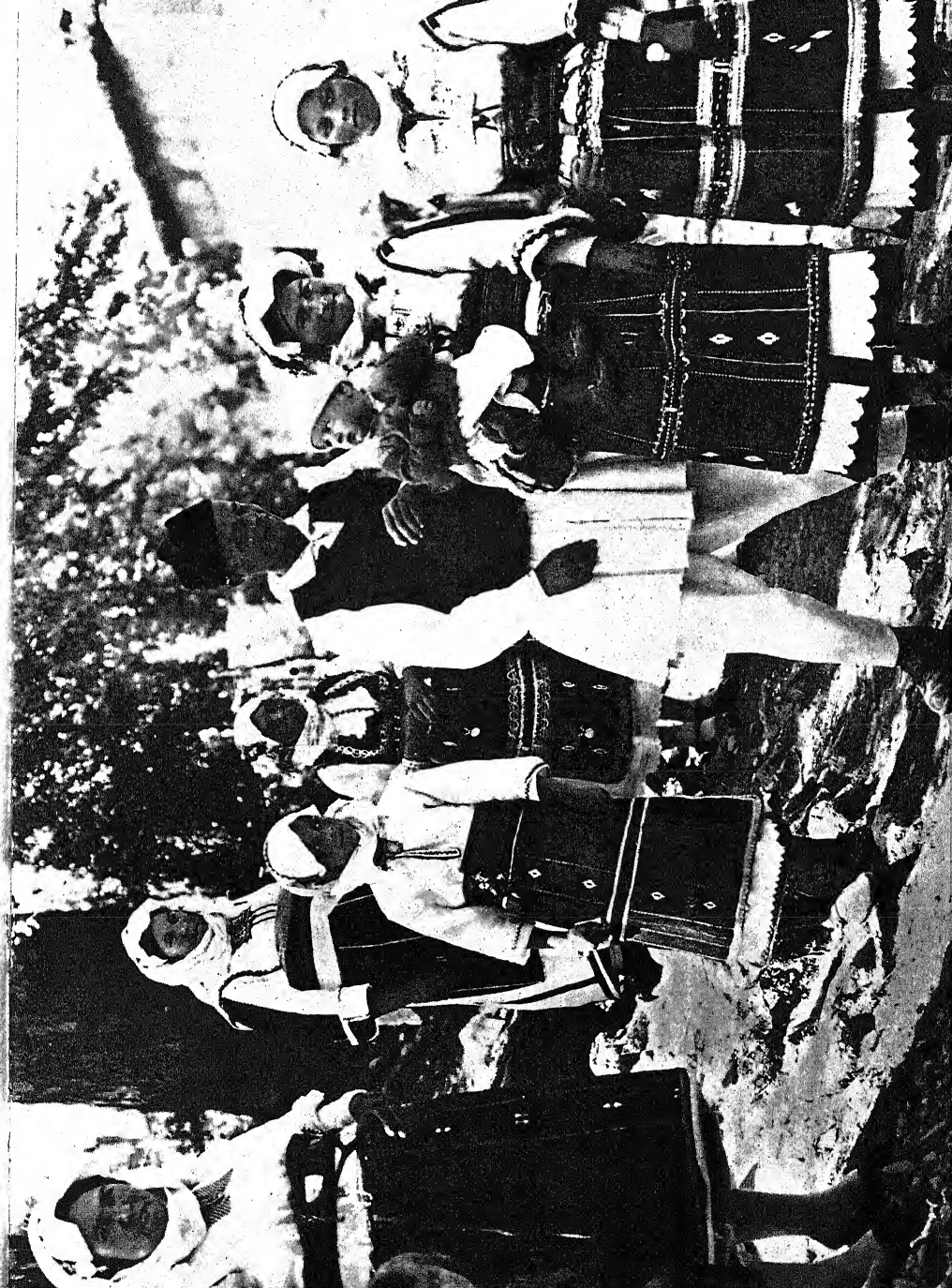
Bardovce was even larger and noiser. The

dancing was in the centre of the village, and offered a wonderful chance, as I thought, for several good pictures. But the dust was so dense whenever the crowd moved about, that visibility was reduced to three yards. I put the camera away and climbed up the balcony of a house that faced the square. Imagine a seething mass of three hundred heads and bodies moving in a long snakey line, and filling the square so completely that it was impossible to walk across except between the dances. Clouds of yellow suffocating dust floated up from the stamping feet, and the Turkish gypsies tore the air with the screaming of their *zurnai* and drums. I sat and watched as long as I could stand the din and dust, thinking how much we should have preferred to go back to Ruštuk.

The only pleasant thing in that afternoon was the church and its beautiful weather-beaten frescoes of saints and bogey men sorting out the good and bad souls at the Day of Judgment. A few of the bogey men were really horrible in appearance, the others had a look of long-suffering and boredom, as though they would like an occasional half holiday from their corrective work. Nevertheless, I prayed that in the next life I should escape the hideous tortures that were depicted on the church walls. As I sat there in the cool darkness I found myself thinking over the strange fallacy that children are profoundly affected by horrible pictures or distressing scenes. On the contrary most children love a really gruesome story or an illustration where men are wallowing in gore. It is grown-up men and

women who are shocked and revolted at such things; that is why the Church has used preventative coloured frescos to stimulate the worshippers in their abhorrence of evil.

When I wandered back to the dancing I noticed another car drawn up beside ours. Evidently there were some other visitors. They turned out to be none other than "the prominent English woman of letters," complete with the Thug and two military officials, and had taken up their position on the balcony of the Gendarmerie which faced the square. As we left Maud waved to this little party, but we had only stony stares returned for our greeting.



CHAPTER EIGHT

THE next morning we took the midday train for Mirovće, a station three hours on the down line to Salonica. I was very sorry to leave Skoplije; one day I shall go back and spend a month there, for there are so many things to see and do in the district. Unfortunately, the Yugoslav Government makes it extremely difficult for foreigners to move about in the Skoplije area. I know of several tourists who were forbidden by the police to pass more than twenty-four hours in the town, and latterly were pestered by so-called secret agents until they reached the capital. This attitude of the Police is in some measure due to their incapability of understanding why anybody should want to go away from the usual tourist haunts unless they have designs on the Peace of the Realm.

The visit to Mirovće¹ was the first high spot on our itinerary. For months previously, correspondence had passed between Maud and the schoolmaster of Djevdjelija. She had persuaded me to go there to see a special performance of the Russalija Mysteries. Normally their dances are only performed at Epiphany, but by some arrangement the schoolmaster, Gospodin Pajkuric, had managed to get the troupe together for a demonstration on Easter Tuesday. I had not the vaguest idea of what

¹ Pronounced Meerôvchay.

we were going to see, and as soon as an opportunity presented itself asked Pajkuric for an explanation.

The Russalija¹ are bands of magic dancers, who from past ages have performed their ritual of purification between the twelve "Unclean Days" that separate Christmas from Epiphany Day. During that time it is customary for the women to refrain from washing their children or household garments. On Christmas Day the troupe meet and take a solemn four-fold vow to keep complete silence when not dancing, to abstain from using the Sign of the Cross (or invoking a blessing under any circumstances whatever), to refuse to greet any person even should they be a close relative or parents, and on no account to toast anybody before or after a drink of wine. Furthermore, in going from place to place they promise not to step into water, and if they find that they must cross a stream that is too wide to jump, a vehicle must be provided to take them across.

The dancers are always paired off with a partner, and the members of each pair are inseparable and welded by the magic oath. Even if a member of the troupe wishes to drop out for a drink of water or some other purpose, his companion must not for one moment leave him alone, but stands beside him waving his naked sword over the head of the other man, so protecting him from the evil spirits that are constantly ready to attack the Russalija. If the troupe sleep at any other village, they are distributed to as many houses as there are pairs; if necessary

¹ Pronounced Rūsahlia.

two pairs sleep in the same house. Should an occasion arise when some of the dancers find themselves passing through their own village, they must not on any account go near their house or family, but avoid every sort of contact with them, however remote. Reasons for this precaution were abundantly illustrated by stories of the direst misfortunes that have befallen those relatives whom the Russalija men have inadvertently visited.

"Only last year," said Pajkuric, "a dancer called Dimitir Stojanovic went to see his newly married wife when he passed through his village en route for Mresicko. Within six hours of his visit she was taken ill with an unknown type of fever and on the fourth day died after a miscarriage. Moreover, six of his pigs and both of his horses died of strange diseases within the Unclean Days."

I am abundantly satisfied that there is every reason for accepting the explanation given by these simple peasants when, in accordance with the curse, disaster falls upon those who come near the Russalija at the wrong moment.

We had a two-mile walk from the station to the village where the dance was to be held. Mules had been provided for transport, but I preferred to load mine with the equipment, and drive it along with a good many whacks and other encouragements. On arrival we had to go to the schoolmaster's house for coffee and introductions. In the distance one could hear the incessant booming of the drums that call the dancers together and warn the villagers of their arrival. We sat there making forced and stupid

conversation whilst outside the sunlight was rapidly fading. I could stand it no longer, and got up abruptly to put the cameras in working order. It seemed ludicrous that having travelled all those hundreds of miles under none too pleasant conditions that we should have to sit and watch the afternoon trickle away.

However rude I may have been, I was at least successful in getting the party outside the house! We marched down in solemn state to the scene of the dance. A finer setting would have been hard to choose. They were dancing on a flat plateau of ground about the size of three tennis courts, that overlooked the whole Vardar valley. In the distance the pale pink and blue hills of Greece rose out of the emerald green marshes, and to the north the mountains loomed up lead grey and charged with storm clouds that were rapidly piling up in threatening blackness. The whole scene was dominated by a great monument at the far end of the ground.

Pajkuric Junior insisted on carrying the cinematograph. I was a fool to let him touch it. For when we came to develop the films some months later, I realised that he had accidentally fiddled with the various speed and exposure controls, thus ruining half the fruits of my labours. But what could I expect? Perhaps the Russalija dances are not for filming?

By the time we arrived the ritual had started. Perched on a ledge of the monument commemorating the disastrous earthquake that com-

pletely devastated the area a few years ago, sat the two *Zurla* players. The drummer stood in front and played with two sticks—one long and wispy, and the other short and hammer-headed. He played an incessant and very complicated tattoo with the thin stick, and used the short one to punctuate the rhythm with terrific crashes that marked the various antics of the dancers.

The dancers wore white full-sleeved shirts, fustanella (pleated cotton kilts), and two red handkerchiefs tied across their chests. On their heads they wore the usual *kulpak* (skin cap) of the district. Each was armed with a Sabre of newly-carved white wood.

From the moment I saw that astounding array of white-kilted men, brandishing their swords and executing a stalking movement, I decided that this Russalija ritual was very closely related, in formation and movement, to the Lama Devil-dances from Tibet. In many particulars, the movements were precisely similar. This was particularly noticeable when they shifted suddenly from the slow deadly stalking movement to the energetic whirling and stamping. The dance was made up in sections of various steps symbolising the different things that the Russalija men were fighting and conquering.

They generally danced one particular step for a complete circuit of the ground, and I noticed the scrupulous care with which the couples kept together and even stepped in each other's footsteps.

Sometimes they battled with unseen devils who, lurking below the surface of the Earth, seek to destroy the crops and afflict little children with epilepsy and ophthalmia. At other moments they were searching out the demons who float in mid air like foul birds. With crafty steps and deadly swords they chased the spirits away. The whole of this astonishing ritual was performed with such earnestness and conviction that all western scepticism melted away.

I simply stared at the dance like a man bewitched, and all idea of filming it seemed to leave me.

Amongst the crowd were half a dozen women attired in their best dresses and loaded with silver ornaments, necklaces and charms. On their heads they wore high crowns exactly like those worn by the queens in Byzantine mosaics and paintings. In Skoplije Museum I had seen a full-length painting of Saint Sophia wearing a duplicate of one of the crowns that I have drawn here—even to the arrangement of the coloured beads and golden glass balls the modern crown worn at Djevdjelija.

From time to time these women joined up with the men and danced a few rounds of a Khoros.

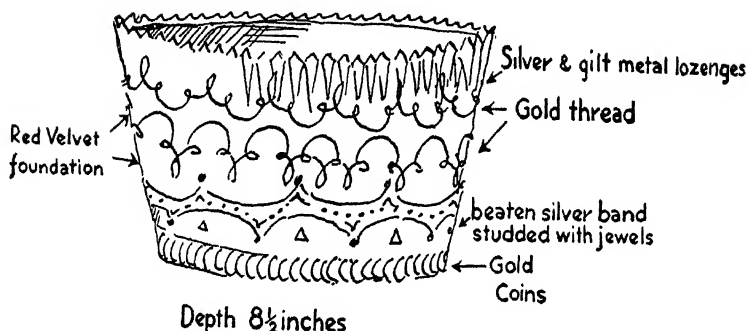
I inquired what these women represented in the ritual but Pajkuric seemed rather vague. They certainly have no *direct* relationship with the Russalija men, since that magic is strictly limited to males. Toward the end of the afternoon, the women formed up a line of their own and started a curious

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

wailing dirge as they moved endlessly round the outside edge of the dancing pitch.

I walked over to watch the women who by this time had built up a chain of twenty people. The raucous persistence of the dirge and its subtle syncopation running against the footwork had an absolutely hypnotic effect. I longed to join their

Kossovo Queen's Crown.



CROWN OF ONE OF THE KOSSOVA QUEENS.

dance, but thought it was a ritual that, as a man, I had no business to approach. I asked Pajkuric what they were doing and what the song meant and learned that they were singing about the defeat of the Serbs at the battle of Kossovo.¹ He was not interested.

"And the words, what do they mean?" I insisted.

He listened to their singing, and then said:

¹ Kossovo was the occasion of the complete defeat and routing of the Serbs by the Turks in 1347.

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

“On the plains of Kossovo, on the fields of Kossovo,
 They are fighting—they are fighting,
 The Kings and the princes, on the Kossovo field.
 They are fighting—they have fallen—
 The Kings and the princes,
 On the field of Kossovo, on the plains of Kossovo.”



* Chromatic wail from top F to starting note.

CHANT OF THE QUEENS OF KOSSOVA.

I thanked him and then ran over to Maud.
 “Maud, Maud, quick, come and look at these women,
 I’ve just discovered what they are meant to be.
 They have got nothing whatever to do with the
 Russalija, they are simply the reincarnation of the
 Queens and Princesses who went to look for their
 dead on the Kossovo battlefield.”

“How do you know that—who told you?” she
 asked, as I dragged her excitedly to watch the women
 who were moving about at a sort of slow jogtrot,
 up and down and in and out like a human cater-
 pillar.

“Well, Pajkuric doesn’t offer the vaguest explana-

tion of *why* they are dressed up that way, all he says is that they are singing a song about the Kossovo Field. But it is absolutely clear to me. They are commemorating in a ritual dance the pitiful search made by their ancestresses for the bodies of fallen at Kossovo. That explains in a nutshell the headgear—those curious Byzantine Crowns.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” admitted Maud reluctantly. Though she agreed that the crowns and the queenly appearance of the women fitted in perfectly with the idea of their representing the bereaved queens and princesses who searched on the field of Kossovo for their royal dead.

I waited until I had grasped the step that they were doing and then seized Maud’s hand, and before either of us had realised what had happened we had joined the “mourners.” Up and down we went, half-shuffling, half-trotting. John joined in higher up the line, but dropped out again as he never really got hold of the foot rhythm that was in threes, and ran against the song rhythm in fours.

The most noticeable thing about that line of women was their utter and complete detachment. Their whole personality had receded from the *now* of time into a *yesterday* six hundred years old. I realised that they neither saw the crowd that looked on, nor felt the dust that rose in clouds round their feet. They were no longer the household drudges, the child-bearers or the women of the village. For a few brief minutes the wearers of those glass-beaded crowns had in very truth taken upon themselves a majesty that was staggering to watch.

The last half-hour before sunset was taken up with general dancing. A strict rule forbids the Russalija to be out of doors after dark, and they consider that the most dangerous time of the whole day is that half-light that follows sunset, for at this hour of the day all the evil forces—werewolves, vampires and elementals roam about unseen and bent on mischief. Everybody danced during that last wild half-hour. The Russalija men took hands and led us off in a great chain.

I danced between the schoolmaster of Mirovće and one of the Russalija men whose name was Lazaré Lazarévic. They shouted various instructions to me about the changes in the rhythm, and when I made a mistake their sheer force of energy dragged me into the right steps. We finished a few minutes after the sun had sunken away like a copper disc behind the now jet-black mountains. It was then decided that the foreigners from England should go up to the headman's house for a few drinks.

We formed up into a raggle procession and marched up the hill to a large house where the headman lived. He was himself an ex-Russalija dancer and had a son and a nephew in the troupe. The house was a maze of rooms and passages. True to the curious tradition that one meets in the Balkans, there were beds in the room where we were ushered. I have never found any explanation of this custom of putting bedsteads in a living-room, but it may be because the best rooms are always the bedrooms, and guests are naturally shown into the best rooms.

We sat round a long deal table, eight of us at each



THE QUEENS OF KOSSOVO.



RUSSALIJA MEN.

side and two at each end. Whilst glasses were passed round brandy and wine arrived in great earthenware jars. Our host did not sit at the table, but stood and watched us drinking. Etiquette does not permit him to sit with his guests; he must stand and wait on them as a servant. The young son of the house who had danced that afternoon told me that it was his last night at home, for the next day he was to go to Skoplje and report for two years' military training. I proposed his health. "To Mikloš and his happiness, and may he soon come back to dance again!" Mikloš asked many questions about London and the army in England. He was amused at the idea of the English having no compulsory military training.

We had entirely forgotten that the last train for Djevdjelija had long since left, and it was decided to pass the night at Mirovće. Nobody was in the least put out at such a suggestion and plans were accordingly made that Maud should sleep in a room at the school house, whilst Pajkuric and son, with John and myself were to go to the Gendarmerie post. Little did I realise that, without saying a word to me, Maud had arranged that we were to get up the next morning before dawn and catch a train for Djevdjelija at five o'clock.

After saying a reluctant good-bye to the friends we had made at the dancing and thanking the headman for our drinks, we walked up in the darkness to the gendarmerie station. Sitting on the top step of the flight that ran up to the front door, was a vast dog who went inside to announce our arrival. Pajkuric was evidently *persona gratissima* with the

authorities who welcomed us with genuine enthusiasm. We shook hands with numerous soldiers and officials whilst the commandant sent a message through to Djevdjelija warning Madame Pajkuric not to expect us back that evening.

The schoolmaster of Mirovće—unfortunately I never learned his name—invited us all up to his house for supper. Here we met his wife and sister-in-law and his seven-month infant daughter.

We had to wait over an hour performing the curious ritual of brandy drinking and hard-boiled egg consumption before the correct moment had arrived for the meal. But when at last, after this tantalising wait, the supper really arrived on the table, it was a feast fit for the Princes of Kossovo. Bean soup with fragments of frizzled bacon floating therein, mutton cutlets and fried potatoes with tomatoes and a savoury pie of barley pastry containing cachecaval¹ and spinach; the whole meal topped with strawberry preserve and further glasses of brandy. I ate with a true Slav appetite, for something seemed to warn me that we were not going to see much food again for twenty-four hours. My premonition was well founded, as events will soon show. I agitated that we should go to bed as soon as possible after supper, as we had a heavy day ahead of us. Getting that party to break up was very difficult, but I managed to get down to the gendarmerie by ten. Pajkuric had a room to himself and a dormitory with seven beds was at the disposal of the three others—Pajkuric Junior, John and self. One of

¹ Cachecaval is a white cheese from sheep's milk.

these beds was occupied by a soldier who was fast asleep. I created rather a stir by insisting on cleaning my teeth before going to bed. John called my attention to the fact that his mattress was still warm and added that he was quite convinced that some wretched man had been turned out of the bed in order to make room for him. Seeing that there are already plenty of vacant places, I did not see why he should conclude this—but I was far too tired to bother with arguing. In a few moments I was asleep, even the smell of sweat on the sheets did not matter.

The next morning we were woken according to plan by a gruff sergeant, who banged a tin jug of water on the ground several times by way of calling us. At first I could not remember where I was or why the jug banging was necessary; but fleabites all over my thighs and stomach were a forcible reminder of our whereabouts. With a great reluctance and weariness I dragged myself out of bed, and dressed by the fitful light of the lamp that the sergeant had brought in with him. None of us spoke much as we dressed. John made some coarse remarks, which under timelier circumstances would have made me laugh, about Pajkuric junior having slept in his boots and hat.

After a mumbled thanks to the officer in charge for our night's shelter, we set off on that two-mile walk back to the Mirovće station. This time there were no mules, and it was almost pitch dark. I wrapped myself up in my greatcoat and trudged along ahead with the heavy bags, cursing the stupid

fates that had made necessary this early departure, and feeling very sick. Maud chatted gaily with Pajkuric in the rear. Providence came to my aid in the form of Lazaré Lazárevic, whom we met en route for the station some little distance farther on. He volunteered to carry the bags. I blessed him and handed them over—keeping the cameras for safety. In the dawn he looked taller and even ghostly without his Russalija costume, which he told me he had left behind in Mirovće, according to custom, to be washed in a stream.

As we walked across the moorland to the station, Lazaré explained to me that he was the *Baltadzhia*¹ of the troupe, and as such held a very important part in its organisation. He was responsible for the discipline of the dancers and the training of new recruits; his friend Vasilé Kristé Vazilevic acted as the leader of the dancers and held the office of *Kesedzhia*.² A *Kesedzhia's* work is to direct the variations of the dance and carry out the routine training when the *Baltadzhia* is not able to do so.

By the time we had reached the station it was quite light, and the last stars faded out of the colourless sky. We sat in the waiting-room for a long time before the train arrived, and our conversation woke the soldier who had spent the night guarding the station buildings. When we took our seats in the train, John asked me how I was feeling, and so I answered, "I loathe getting up early in the morning more than anything else I know, even more than going to the dentist. But I

¹ Captain-in-charge.

² Axebearer.

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

am quite prepared to sit up all night, either working or playing, provided that nobody asks me to get out of bed before I feel so inclined."

They seemed to think this was a huge joke, and laughed at my discomfort, so I gave up all effort to be conversational and dropped into a fitful doze.

CHAPTER NINE

WE arrived at Djevdjelija at six, and Pajkuric insisted that we should visit his house in the town to meet his wife. So we left the baggage and passports at the station with the military guard.

For some secret reason, best known to the police, persons visiting Djevdjelija in transit are not on any account allowed to walk about with their passport. The town is on the Greeco-Yugoslav frontier.

The Yugoslav government wastes time and money preventing visitors from doing things that would never occur to most rational people, yet it makes a great show of encouraging "tourism" at the State Travel Bureau, where so often the information is obsolete or inaccurate. Who but a madman would want to get across the Vardar into Greece—a great river 80 yards in width—and what fun is there in a twenty mile walk to a Bulgarian no-man's land? No self-respecting spy would dream of anything so crude. The police are as nervous as cats. To them anybody has the makings of an evil-doer, and if it had not been for our good friend Pajkuric, John would most certainly have been put in prison that morning. The saga of How John was Arrested as a Spy is worth recording. It may serve as a warning to any reader who may intend to visit Djevdjelija.

Madame Pajkuric was overjoyed to see her husband and son safely returned. The phone message had never reached her to say that they were staying the night at Mirovće with us. Naturally she had been worried to death wondering what had happened to them.

She served us with apricot jam and coffee. Eating neat jam without any bread is a custom which one has to accept in all Balkan countries. A spoonful of jam is a pleasant surprise, when one feels like it, but on an empty stomach at six o'clock in the morning the effect is not exactly comforting. I would have cheerfully paid several shillings for a cup of white coffee and a mouthful of clean bread. Such things did not exist in Djevdjelija, as we latterly discovered when we had spent half an hour talking about nothing to the Pajkurić household.

We were determined to find something to eat, and crossed the road to the one and only hotel in the town. I have seen some bedraggled places in my day, but nothing to beat the interior of the room where we sat to eat our breakfast of bread and rancid garlic sausage. The other two would not touch the coffee when it arrived, so I drank the lot. None of us dare eat the sausage, so I asked for some butter to spread on our bread. When it arrived it appeared to be relatively fresh, and tasted of nothing except linseed oil.

After this jolly meal John decided that he must have exercise. All true Englishmen suffer from this delusion in warm climates. He furthermore decided that he was going to walk "up onto that hill behind

the town, to see the view." Both Maud and I implored him not to go away from us, giving many good reasons for not going onto the hill which might be private. However, he became truculent and very obstinate. So off he went, after he had promised to be at the station a quarter of an hour before the Salonica train started. My last words to him were a warning against leaving the road, but he took no notice except to grin and say that I was a fool to be always meddling with his plans.

Maud and I walked down to the station, and on the way bought some food for the journey to Salonica. We decided that it would be pleasant to wander along the road running away from the town across what appeared to be water meadows. I found a small bridge where I could sit and watch the tadpoles swimming in a stream that ran by the roadside. Maud walked on alone, so I took off my shoes and stockings and paddled. The water was warm and pleasant.

All around in the marsh an army of frogs kept up an incessant conversation. Apart from their hideous chatter it was very peaceful. Every few minutes a great white stork would swoop down and capture a frog, sometimes eating it on the spot and sometimes taking the catch back to the nests on top of the ruined tobacco factory that had been bombarded in the War.

I went off in search of Maud and found her sitting by the roadside gazing out over the flat marshy plain.

"This place must be alive with mosquitoes and

malaria," she said when I arrived. "They say that during the War Djevdjelija was the worst spot on the Salonica front."

"Yes, and even now doesn't seem to have changed much," I answered.

We walked on to look at a mass of ruins, stark crumbling walls of what had once been houses crowning a hill. They looked as though they had been bombarded the day before our arrival. Just past the ruins the road curved to the left and ran across an iron suspension bridge. Several huts stood near the bridge.

"I want to see what's round that corner," said Maud, and walked on in front.

She hadn't advanced more than a dozen steps before a soldier ran out with a gun and waved us back. I shouted that we only wished to see the bridge. So he watched us to make certain there was no funny business with bombs or cameras. Bomb outrages were plentiful a short time ago in this area, so the authorities take no chances with strangers.

On the way back to the station we wondered what John had found at the top of his hill. We speculated even more anxiously when the boy still failed to appear within two minutes of the train's departure.

"I should *never* have let him go," complained Maud bitterly.

"Well," said I, "there is but one thing to decide, are we going to spend another four hours in this God-forsaken place waiting for him, or are we going

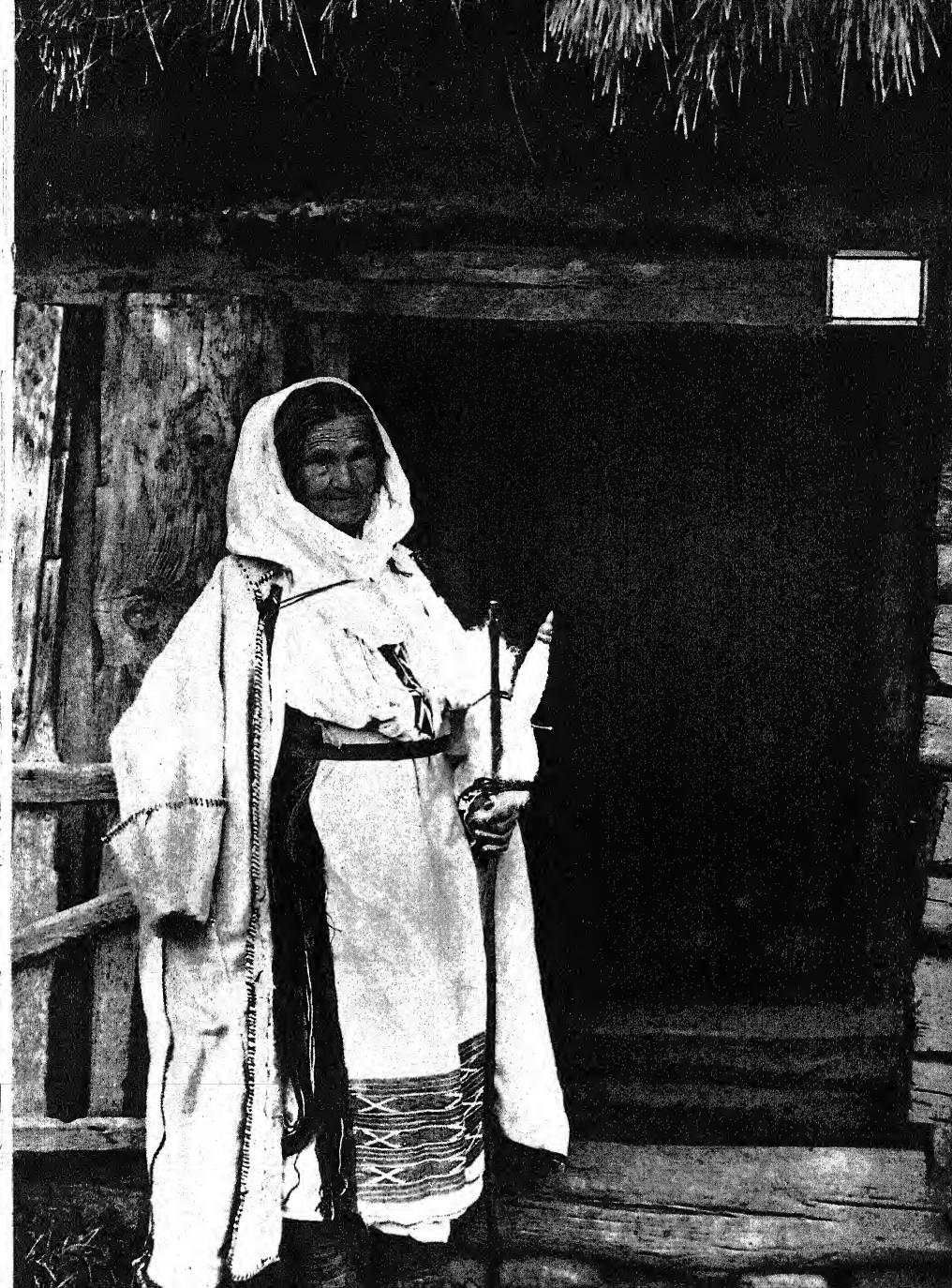
on to Salonica and leaving him to get into Greece alone."

Maud determined not to wait, and we left a message and his passport with the station-master. The train moved off across the bridge that joins the two frontiers, and we were in Greece.

"Perhaps he has forgotten the time," I ventured.

"No, no he couldn't—it's just his carelessness." Maud sighed. She was obviously worried about John. So was I; and so furious with him that anger hid my uneasiness. I explained to the Greek Customs man that a "young Englishman," speaking no French or German, would be coming through the Customs by the evening train, and would he be kind to him. A hundred drachmæ note slipped into the passport brought ready assurances that he would look out for John and help him if in difficulties. Then I asked if I might use the telephone and call up the station on the Yugoslav side of the frontier, to inquire if John had merely missed the train by a few minutes. This request seemed quite out of place, as the Customs man quickly informed me that such a thing had never been done and he could not at this juncture make an exception of me. So I got back into the compartment, and as the train steamed off we discussed the various things that might have happened to him, and wondered how much—if any—money he had on him.

Maud looked haggard and white with worry, and I felt as though I was going to have another bout of fever when I discovered my temperature had suddenly rushed up. The concern I showed for myself luckily



made her laugh, because I inquired if she thought I looked ill. As the day wore on we both became more and more apprehensive, and after a most unpalatable meal of bread and hard-boiled eggs a week old, I suggested we should try to sleep. We had already been on our feet for twelve hours.

We arrived at Salonica in the early evening, and drove to the hotel I knew to be a pleasant one. By the time we both had baths and followed that luxury with tea on the terrace overlooking the waterfront, reassurance had returned. Maud even turned over what she was going to say to John when he arrived at the station. We walked to meet the evening train. It took considerable explanation before we were allowed on the platform. Since we were not passengers the official could not imagine why we wanted to enter the station, but he let us go to the buffet to have a drink.

When at last the train arrived I could see no sign of John. My heart sank, and I was full of fear for his safety. But Maud caught sight of him fiercely arguing with a porter who wanted to carry his suitcase. John looked completely exhausted, filthy dirty, and dressed as though he had been fighting in the street. His condition was so pitiable, and our relief at seeing him so sincere, that our carefully rehearsed words of reprimand were forgotten in the reunion.

"Whatever happened?" said Maud and I together.

"Only that I just missed the train by about four minutes," replied John. But as soon as we were safely in the taxi we cross-examined him until he

told us that he had been up on the hill and arrested as a spy.

"As I thought," I added with some satisfaction.

"Now, John dear, tell us the story from the beginning, and Philip, you keep quiet," Maud replied.

"Well, when I'd got to the top I sat down and had a rest. The view was wonderful, you could see for miles."

"Yes, yes, and then?" I urged him on, knowing that he would happily go on describing the view indefinitely.

"And then, just as I was getting up to go, an armed soldier came up to me and said I must follow him to the fort at the top of the hill."

Maud interrupted him. "How did you know what he was saying "

"I didn't have to try very hard, he levelled the gun at me and waved me on in front. At the fort they stripped me down to my shirt, and took everything out of my pockets to examine my belongings. I had one or two photographs which they were very anxious about, and took me before their Captain."

"Still in your shirt?"

"No, I dressed. But this will make you laugh. The Captain, or whatever he was, could not attend to me for over half an hour, as he was having his corns cut. When I went into his room his feet were soaking in hot water."

This picture of John and the Commandant was too much for me.

"You needn't laugh like that, he simply signed an order, saying that if my passport was at the station and in order they were to release me. I told them I was in a great hurry to catch the midday train, so they stopped the first people they found with donkeys, and we rode as fast as possible back to Djevdjelija. But you had gone when we arrived. I *was* furious."

"Yes, and so were we, John," said Maud quietly.

"It wasn't my fault, now, was it?" retorted John, in no whit discouraged by his adventure.

"Well, all I can say is, that you were extraordinarily lucky not to find yourself behind prison bars. But what did you do all day after your release?"

"I went straight to Pajkurić's house and had a good lunch, and told them all about my arrest—they were very interested."

John is a remarkable person, full of independence and infallability—the gifts of youthful ignorance.

Maud was anxious to celebrate our arrival by broaching a bottle of wine at dinner that evening. She had heard in England that a certain brand of Greek wine called Rezinata was well worth sampling. We asked for Rezinata. The waiter said he had an exquisite vintage, and brought us a bottle costing seventy-five drachmæ. When I said that a bottle of good white wine can be bought for fifteen drachmæ, a price like seventy-five led us to expect Nectar. But it was a tepid and very acrid liquid, well flavoured with turpentine. "Nothing has gone well to-day," I complained. "Even the wines are against us."

"Now, Philip," said Maud, fixing me with one of her special penetrating stares, "I want to know whether you are coming on with us to Athens tomorrow, or whether you feel ill again?"

"Ill?"

"Yes—ill. You said you were going to stay in Salonica to recuperate, and if you are thinking of doing so, John and I are going on to Athens tomorrow without you."

"It depends on how early I shall have to get up. To-day's efforts have almost done me in."

They both sat back and hooted with glee. In the end it was decided we should all go on the seventhirty train in the morning. The journey according to the time-table took fourteen hours. This did not seem to matter to them, though it was a prospect that chilled me to the marrow.

I went straight to bed.

The first four hours of the journey were pleasant and full of interest. We had found no accommodation in the second class, and felt justified in getting into an empty first-class compartment. The ticket collector said we need not pay excess till we reached Larissa, where every seat must have been occupied, judging from the mob of shouting men and women who attacked the train. Eight of these wild animals burst into the compartment and filled every inch of space with their baggage and innumerable parcels.

A big party of noisy boy scouts also boarded the train at Larissa. They were the noisiest set of hooligans Baden Powell could wish to see, and made the journey hideous with their mouth-organs and

concertinas. When we stopped at the small stations their chief amusement was to monopolise the drinking tap. Most of them looked gawky and underfed. None of them could have had a bath for a long time, if the atmosphere of their compartment was any guide to the occupants' state of cleanliness.

Meanwhile, the sun had become blazing hot and poured in at the windows. Conditions were rapidly developing into a miniature Black hole of Calcutta. We went down the train for lunch. On the way I called in to wash. At first I thought I had made a mistake and walked into a cubby-hole reserved for the travelling of animals. But no, it was the Greek version of a train convenience. There was no soap, and the only water I could find was oozing out of a cracked pipe that ran down the wall. The wash-basin was cracked in four pieces and the sanitary arrangements consisted of a hole bored in the floor—and this hole was choked with accumulations of filth and newspaper. It was impossible to lock the door of this attractive place, as the lock had been carefully removed. One or two obscene pictures were scratched on the blistered varnish of the door. I stood and surveyed all these things and then walked out feeling rather sick.

"Well, did you find it?" said John when I found them in the dining-car.

"I did—and it is a treat in store for you!"

The meal was not a success. Maud was squeamish about the flavour of the food and the cleanliness of the kitchen. She lunched on bread and mineral water, but I managed to get down to a plate of

yellow rice cooked in mutton fat. Almost everything you eat in Greece smells of mutton or goats. The waiter offered me a plate of what looked like a delicious trifle, so I took it after some hesitation. The others said they might follow my example after I had sampled it. Their caution was well founded, for after a couple of mouthfuls I put down the spoon and hastily swallowed a chunk of bread to remove the filthy taste. It tasted like bilge water, and was liberally flavoured with aniseed.

In some mysterious way the occupants of the compartment had entirely changed when we got back to our seats; instead there were a number of young officers, three in mufti and two in uniform. For the next five hours the train, which stopped at every station no matter how small, became like a furnace. My thermometer registered eighty-two degrees in the compartment, and over 100 degrees in the corridor. Add to this heat and congestion the fact that the blinds did not work, and that it was impossible to have the window or door open except for very brief intervals, and you have some picture of the discomfort that was slowly mounting to an unbearable pitch. As we climbed over and through the ranges of mountains naturally we passed through hundreds of tunnels, some only a few yards long—others lasting several minutes. The tunnels apparently were devoid of any ventilation shafts, and the sulphurous pitch-black smoke poured into the compartment if the window was accidentally forgotten. Even the Greek officers found the conditions becoming insufferable, and the man sitting next to

me said that the railway was a disgrace to the nation. "But what can we do with a government of fools and sharks, a public who don't care, and a total absence of any national pride—in England you are more united?"

"United? Perhaps; but we should wreck the trains and hang the officials if they ran the services like this," I answered from behind a scarf that was covering my mouth and nose. We discussed the evils of State Railways and the changes that a strong government might do in Greece.

"What about your King George—will he get on with things?" I queried after they had warmed to the discussion.

There was a momentary silence and a young officer in uniform answered with a disarming smile, "We are soldiers, monsieur, you must ask the man in the street that question."

"Yes, yes, exactly!" put in his friend sitting by me. "We are soldiers, we have to keep the peace and organise the army; we are far too busy to dabble in politics. If our king keeps his throne, it will depend entirely on the politicians; and the politicians in their turn depend on public opinion. Personally, I think that the Greek public is too busy with its own money-making to bother much with politics, but there are always those who will start a row if they are paid enough."

"But is he *liked* by the people—do they cheer him in the streets?"

"That you shall discover for yourself in Athens!" came the quick reply.

We all laughed. Obviously I had no business to ask such questions, so I tried another line.

"What about all this unrest in Salonica, the papers are full of threatened strikes and pro-Bulgar rumours?"

Just as a man who hitherto had not spoken was about to give his opinion, we shot into another tunnel. Frantic efforts were made in the darkness to close the window and door. When we came out at the other end the new man said rather shyly :

"I am a Macedonian of Bulgarian extraction, I serve in the army, as you see, but I have no hesitation in saying that sooner or later there will inevitably be trouble over Salonica. At one time it was more or less half-Bulgar, a quarter Jewish, a quarter Turkish. It is only a silly farce for the Government in Athens to think that the sympathies of the inhabitants are pro-Greek. Macedonia will one day demand independence to act how she pleases. And when that day comes—God help the Government."

He had spoken in a quiet undemonstrative way, like a man who has weighed his thoughts, and his words were the more impressive for their restraint.

"What will the next move be?" I asked, after we had sat in silence thinking over what he had said.

"Nobody can see so far ahead with any accuracy, but personally I should not be surprised if one day the Bulgars and Turks make an alliance, and force us to give back the Thracian coast from Salonica to Istanboul."

"You as an Englishman cannot be expected to

have any conception of the tensions that have and, in fact, still exist over Macedonia. The Serbs have seized large pieces of what used to be Turkey and Bulgaria, we were landed with the Thracian coast and sacrificed Smyrna. One of the maddest blunders that any Greek Government ever made. What is the result? Why, a deadly hatred that burns everywhere like a hidden volcano. We hate and fear the Bulgars. The Turks despise us, and whatever the officials tell you the Serbs are still terrified of Bulgarian vengeance. It's a fantastic jumble. I hope that I am not near Salonica when the fighting starts."

The man next to me switched the conversation on to more ethical lines. "Did the English Government consider it a just measure of peace to fire on crowds of strikers?"

I was puzzled what to answer. "We luckily have few strikes that ever get to that pitch of necessity when more than a few policemen are necessary to keep the crowd in order. But in 1926 I remember the whole country was paralysed for days because of a General Strike of all workers."

This gave rise to further questions about the rights of the citizen in England, and how far bribery and corruption had entered our political life. They were astounded when I said that so far as I knew no policemen carried revolvers.

"Only a nation of unimaginatives could be so law-abiding," remarked a solemn man sitting in the farthest corner.

Quick to cover up this seeming rudeness the first speaker added, "But *mon cher*, that is the secret of

their success. They only see what is there, not what they imagine—like us.”

As it grew late in the afternoon I suggested we might go along to the “diner” for coffee. Two of the officers accepted my invitation. As we left, John remarked to me that when the train next stopped he had every intention of getting off and having a drink of water from the tap that was provided on each of the platforms. I entreated him to avoid being left behind, and walked along the corridor after the others.

In justice to the railway let it be said that the coffee was excellent, we sat and drank several cups. They asked me my business in Greece, and when I told them the elder whose name was Appolos Dimitriadis pulled a wallet from his coat and wrote something on a visiting card. Handing the card to me, he said,

“An introduction to one of the finest dancers in Athens. Just call and give him my card—we are cousins.”

I thanked him and gave him my own card, adding, that perhaps one day he would find himself in London, and I might have the honour of meeting him again.

Another three hours dragged by. Conversation had dried up with fatigue; we all lay back in our seats and tried to sleep. I managed to get Maud and John to try a little dinner, and then we trudged back to the compartment again.

“We still have two hours to go,” said John wearily.



I nodded and closed my eyes. Two hours—two hours and a half—two hours and forty-five minutes—still we had not reached Athens. “My God, is the journey never going to end?” said John defiantly, and started to put on his hat.

Even as he spoke, Maud, who was facing the engine, sat up with a look of hope, and said, “Look—lights. We *must* be there.”

“We are just outside Athens, madame,” said my neighbour Dimitriadis. “In a few minutes we shall doubtless arrive if they have a vacant line.”

The protraction of that arrival was like a subtle torture. First we went forward at a snail’s pace, then we shunted backwards, and so on, until at last the train arrived precisely one hour late. But the great thing was to have arrived at all.

In the taxi Maud had revived enough to remark after some calculations with her watch, “That trip has taken fifteen hours; how I long for a bath and a bed.”

“Yes, it was an ordeal. I rather expected it, but we shall soon be at the hotel. I know you’ll like the situation.”

But she hated the hotel. The rooms I had booked weeks before through a certain Greek agency had never been reserved, nor had they any trace of my name on their files. But they promised us excellent accommodation the next day if John and I would share a double room for the night. Maud was offered another double room on the front, but she solved the difficulty by getting into a cab and driving off on her own.

Twice I nearly fell asleep whilst unpacking and would have cheerfully stretched myself on the bed as I was, but somehow managed to stay awake long enough to undress and wash off the grime of that journey.

When I woke, John had dressed and was going off in search of Maud. I arranged to meet him for lunch at midday and dozed off again, but the racket of the passing trams that ran along just outside my window made sleep impossible. I got up and dressed, dancing round over the beds in a sudden wave of energy.

Downstairs at the cashier's desk the immaculately dressed manager asked me if "my auntie" was coming back to stay with me. I replied, "That's exactly what I'm going to find out." And pushed through the doors before he should see me laughing.

CHAPTER TEN

ATHENS is a city of violent contrasts. It is also the noisiest capital in Europe—always excepting Bucharest of course. I walked down that wonderful main street that runs to the very foot of the Acropolis, and decided that here was a city where time had long ceased to have the slightest significance.

Nobody hurried except myself, and nearly every man I passed on the pavements was twisting a watch chain or a string of beads in his fingers.

The public buildings were well built and occasionally magnificent, but the pavements running along outside them were cracked and dirty. Some of the shops were finer than anything in Regent Street, yet all the nickel-plated fittings were covered in dust and in some instances the lettering over the windows was tarnished and ready to fall. Near the square where I found the General Post Office were men selling everything under the sun from sponges to pornographic post cards. Everybody was talking in that harsh guttural hiss. Modern Greek must surely be the most acoustically penetrating of languages. In spite of this advantage, because of the noise of the trams, the speakers had to shout at the top of their voices the whole time.

I subsequently discovered that everybody shouts when speaking Greek. It appears to be an essential part of the language, so also is a certain amount of

threatening gesticulation. Even when speaking another language—French—in the post office, I found that it was more easily understood if I used my open hands like fans and fluttered them about the face of the man behind the counter. According to the guide books French is supposed to be the second language of the Government Offices, but it is rare to find any one except an educated Greek who can make any intelligent observations in that tongue.

Armed with a letter of credit from my bank in London, I went off to cash some pounds into drachmæ. In matters of banking business the Greeks are alert as ferrets. I cashed that money in a few moments without the slightest hitch though it took twenty minutes' argument with a man in the telegraph office before I could make him send off a wire to England. A queue of seven other people formed behind me whilst he raised one footling objection after another. The Greeks are peculiarly cold in their treatment of outsiders who try to hurry them in the post office. They stood there with the same expressions of resigned aloofness that you see on the faces of the early carvings. Waiting for twenty minutes meant as little to them as it annoyed me.

Unless he knows you personally the modern Greek does not bother himself in any way, either to please or offend you. Perhaps this is in some measure due to centuries of interference and persecution from various invading hordes. Athenians can be the most unreliable cheats or disarming friends, just as they choose.

The police are little men dressed in green uniforms. Few of them have the vaguest idea of the locality of any street off the main lines of traffic, but they are delighted to take you tenderly by the arm to consult their nearest colleague. After a lengthy argument during which you write out the address in Greek letters, they stop the first taxi they see and instruct the driver to take you to the National Museum or the Hotel Grand Bretagne. If you learned a little Greek at school it may serve to help in deciphering the cinema placards and shop signs, but as a guide to the language or pronunciation such knowledge only adds to the confusion. Scarcely any words of the Attic Greek we learned bear any phonetic resemblance to the spoken language of Athens.

The paper boys who swarm the streets every few hours, with fresh editions of their respective news-sheets, have a singular technique of shouting. If such cries were heard in the Strand the public would stampede to buy copies of the paper, thinking that only a German invasion or a severe outbreak of bubonic plague in Birmingham, or a nationalist rising in Carnarvon could warrant such a terrifying salesmanship.

At that time the Italians were making their last big push on Addis Ababa, and shortly before the capital fell, one Greek paper brought out a bitter satire in the form of a Gethsemane cartoon. In the garden, the Negus and his disciples (the League of Nations) were surrounded by the Roman soldiers headed by Mussolini. But the delicate satire lay in

the portrayal of Judas as a certain prominent Englishman, kissing the wretched Negus on the cheek..

Feelings were running very high during those weeks after Easter. Nobody knew which way the Mediterranean cat would jump and every fresh edition brought out new rumours of intended hostilities. I read open declarations that in the event of war the Greeks would willingly offer the use of their innumerable waterways and harbours to the British Fleet. Naturally I wondered whether it was safe to go on to Turkey and the Balkan States.

One day we were sitting outside a café when the paper boys started rushing down the street with frenzied cries more alarming than any previously heard in Athens. I stood up, and said with an uncertain voice, "Maud—it's war!" But it was only the early results of a recent State Lottery.

I spent many hours sitting on the Acropolis and dreaming of the ancients who had first made Athens the centre of that vast civilisation that poured out its influence into Egypt—across Asia and northwards beyond the Balkan ranges. It was hard to imagine, except in that sanctuary high above the modern city of a million inhabitants, that men such as Plato and Praxiteles could have lived in Athens, or that only a few hundred yards to the left a little Tentmaker had roused the religious enthusiasm of the Athenians who loved to hear any new thing. Mars Hill has not changed much, perhaps Saint Paul would find that he recognised the spot where he faced his hecklers.

But what would the others, have said at the

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

sight of those splintered columns and ruined temples? And below their feet, stretching out as far as Piræus, the roofs of houses, churches and factories, punctuated by the slender wands of the transmitting station. They would have heard the roar and



ST. GEORGE'S HILL FROM THE ACROPOLIS.

clanging of traffic that rises up with the yellow dust from the half-finished streets in the suburbs, and perhaps have laughed with me at the remarks of the tourists who wander about gaping at the relics of a civilisation that they will never understand in spite of their guide books.

I think that the Acropolis really contains the

secret of the Glory that was Greece. The museums have countless treasures stored away, but the only things that I shall ever remember with any vividness *happened* on me whilst I sat about on those saffron-coloured blocks of marble and gazed for hours at the many views and shattered monuments.

Wild flowers bloom in the choked water channels and green lizards rush about in the rank grass that grows along the western wall. At night the Athenians floodlight the Acropolis and then from the streets below the Parthenon looks like a mysterious fairy temple, floating in the purple sky.

Maud decided to join us at our hotel because she had found centipedes and cockroaches under the bed where she had spent the night. The Acropole Hotel, where we spent the next week, was an amusing place—very impressive on the first two floors, but tailed off a bit as you reached the third and fourth, where we were stationed. I made a protest about the hot water, which never ran hot except at three in the afternoon, and the service which was deplorable.

The chambermaid on my floor was a remarkable woman who said she spoke English, but it was very like the music hall Chinese-English used by Oriental conjurers and tight-rope walkers. I had the greatest difficulty in controlling myself whenever she spoke to me, particularly if we had any business to transact, such as laundry lists or a request for a fresh towel. A tap at the outer door announced her arrival. "Come in, please," I would shout back. She then stood in the door smiling and if it was the first time she had seen me that morning invariably said:

"Ello. Gut mornin' you are so well—yeaaays?"

"Yes, very well, thank you. Will you have these things washed by Wednesday?"

She took the articles and without looking to see how many there were, would reply, "Ah—washy washy—yeaaays?"

"Yes. Washy, can you do it for Wednesday, please?"

"Washy finished Weaynsday. Yeaaays?"

"That's right. Washy come back on Wednesday," I generally replied.

Then, without any warning, she would say, "You going to-morrow?"

"No, no. Not going for long time," this reassuringly.

"To-morrow washy come back all finish."

"That's very nice, but don't forget Wednesday."

"You going Wednesday? Yeaaays?"

"No, no, no. Much later."

"What time you go? What time I come with washy?"

And so it would go on until in desperation I started to explain in French that the washing had no remote bearing on my movements and vice versa, nor had the hour of my departure been fixed.

She spoke fluent French, Turkish, Armenian and Greek, besides having a good working knowledge of Italian, but English was a tongue newly acquired since her arrival in Athens as a refugee from Istanboul. One evening after bringing back some washing I offered her a cigarette. She sat down heavily in a chair looking so miserable and exhausted

that I asked if it had been a heavier day than usual.

"*Mais oui, m'sieur, c'est toujours les mêmes.*

"*Comment ça ?*"

"I start at five and work as you know till ten every evening and get my food, a bed and a few drachmæ for the work."

"How long have you done this sort of thing you——?"

"How long—how long? *Fils de Dieu!* I am a daughter of an officer who died actually fighting in the Turkish army. We lived in Constantinople since I was a child, but after they started turning out the Greeks, I like countless others, found myself here in Athens, homeless and destitute. My brother is a professor in a school in Cairo, my other sister in Minneapolis is married to an American. I am a common chambermaid in a hotel. *Voilà mon histoire!*"

She sat back and smoked the cigarette. For some time neither of us spoke. I got up and looked out of the window; it was embarrassing to find that this woman who had slopped in and out of my bedroom in her carpet slippers, and made me laugh with her pathetic English, was in reality an ex-member of the Istanboul aristocracy. But she broke the awkward silence herself with a wild, bitter laugh, and said:

"Do you know what many of the women in my position have been forced to do since coming here and finding no work?"

"No. What?"

"Just think for a moment of the condition of



some of them. They had no training for any work, either domestic or economic. Few had any money whatever, and all who were independent of families like myself simply had to find work or else starve."

"Yes, of course."

"There's one sort of work that every woman can try—a time-honoured profession in the Mediterranean. Young bodies sell well in warm climates, and Piræus is a big port as you know, m'sieur!"

"Prostitution?"

"Of course. With luck and a good face they earned a lot the first two years—after that trade naturally dropped off, particularly as half of them picked up . . ."

Outside on the landing a room bell buzzed angrily like a wasp. The chambermaid stubbed out her cigarette on the marble-topped table, and said as she turned to go:

"One tells to strangers things that are locked away from the closest friends. Thank you for the smoke. *Au revoir, m'sieur.*" And with that she vanished round the door, shuffling off in her bedroom slippers to attend to some impatient visitor. What seemed so fantastic about her tale was the resigned hopelessness with which she accepted the situation.

We in England will never realise what minority questions really imply. Here was a vivid instance of how the repatriation of Greek nationals from Turkey so far from solving any problem had created a new one of an infinitely worse nature.

It is all very well for the Greek tourist people to

print on their blue travellers' folders the glib words, "Greece has happily no further minority problems, for she has arranged exchanges of nationals with her neighbours, Turkey and Bulgaria."

But what of Bulgaria's side of the fence? When I found myself some months later in the tram running from Sophia to Gornya Banya, we passed hundreds of little houses—some only hovels—where the Bulgars had been turned out of their houses when the Thracian coast became Greek territory. In exile they now fight for a meagre existence, depending largely on the government's help, but in their original homes they were among the most prosperous of the traders and tobacco farmers on the North Ægean coast. Peace plays even harder tricks than war, when its results entail reshuffling families and wholesale transportation of the results.

I felt depressed and put on my hat to go and visit the cousin of Dimitriadis.

In spite of the clearly addressed visiting card that I held in front of every gendarme whom I consulted none of them had any idea where *Odos Patisson* was to be found. One of them started the dodge of stopping a taxi, but I had learned by bitter experience this meant a visit to the *Grand Bretagne*, so I thanked him with a bow, and walked into the first shop that looked at all hopeful. It was an outfitter and general clothes store. Luck was on my side. Not only did they know exactly where to find *Odos Patisson*, but even suggested that they might phone up the gentleman "just in kess 'ee not theyre."

I sat down and looked at the pile of cotton *crêpe*

pants that lay on the counter. They were exactly what one cannot buy in England because nobody makes them, and I asked the price. But the woman behind the counter did not speak English or French, she just smiled sweetly and pointed to her boss, who was phoning.

The boss came back from the phone and said, "Thê jentlemans very pleest to see you—go round now in ees shop."

"That's very kind of you, I'm sure. Perhaps you would write down where his shop is on this paper."

"Yeaaays, it ees in Odos Patisson," he answered—just like the chambermaid. Whilst he did so, the woman whispered something to him, obviously about the pants and my inquiries as to their price. When he handed me the new address with fresh smiles the matter was broached again. "Mistair like the pants. Yeaaays? Very gôt; very sheep; very stronk."

"They are excellent. How much the pair?"

How much was I worth? How much would I stand?

"These very gôt pants I shall sell at 200 drachmæ."

I rose to go, intending to buy two pairs, but not at that price.

"I am afraid I could not pay so much as that. It is a pity that they are too dear; I might have had four pairs."

His eyes glinted like a snake's when it blinks.

"Khow mush? Khow mush then?"

"Well, if they were, say 100 drachmæ."

"Oiké. Oiké. No, we shall say 115—yeaaays? Very nice; very stronk."

"Very good. Two pairs at 115 drachmæ." Before he could remonstrate any further, the money was on the counter and the deal was done.

The small son of the proprietor was called up from the back of the shop, and told to put me on the right road for Odos¹ Patisson. As we left the premises I noticed precisely the same article hanging in the window and gasped—priced at 100 drachmæ. The Greeks have a wonderful sense of business; they possess just that right balance of cunning and imagination to strike the iron when it is hottest.

After wandering about for some minutes, having passed the right door several times, I unearthed the other Dimitriadis. Unearthed describes exactly the process of discovery, for he worked in a cellar at the bottom of two flights of iron steps. There was an atmosphere of complete seclusion in that subterranean workshop. All round the walls were festoons of musical instruments, hanging close together in the perpetual twilight, wrapped up in paper or baize jackets. A man was busy at work on a broken violin-belly, he did not look up until I was almost standing over him.

"Monsieur Dimitriadis, your cousin told me to call in and see you, and to give you this card." He took the card from me with a bow, and glanced at the writing. While he read the message a smile spread over his solemn, pallid face, and offering a hand still covered with fine sawdust, he greeted me.

¹ Odos—Street.

"Albert Simonidas——"

"Philip Thornton," I replied.

"Please sit down and tell me what I can do for you. You will excuse me if I finish working on this instrument?"

I sat on the edge of the bench and watched him filing a strut of sycamore, wondering what to say next, for it is always difficult to find the right words on these occasions.

"Your cousin told me that you were an authority on folk dancing, and that I should find excellent advice if you could be persuaded to give it. As you know, I am here to get information about such matters."

"I am certainly deeply interested in dancing—in fact, I longed to be trained in Vienna for the ballet, but the war stopped that. The best advice I can give you is to show you some of our records upstairs and perhaps a few typical steps. That is if you care to wait?"

"I am only too delighted to sit still in this cool workshop. It is very hot in Athens."

"Hot? This is only a sample of spring weather. In June and July it becomes really hot; nobody moves about except in the early morning or evening."

We chatted about my visit to Djevdjelija and the other villages, and I tried to get him to tell me where to see any dancing near Athens, but apart from the well-known and very touristy Megara he said he knew of very little of genuine interest. I also said that a Greek in London had advised me to go to Chios.¹

¹ Chios is a large island, S. of Mitelene, off the Turkish coast near Smyrna.

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

"Chios?" he said, and stared at me. "Chios is the centre of the revolutionary workers movement, that is all I have ever heard of it. But perhaps you have other interests besides folk music?"

When he had finished working on the violin, and washed the glue from his hands we went up the stairs to a room that overlooked the street. A stout man was told to bring in a gramophone and two chairs, whilst Albert Leonidas picked out a number of records from various bins that lined one wall. We sat and listened to music from all over Southern Greece, mostly of the Kalamatianos type that is counted as ¹one-²two, ³one-⁴two, ⁵one, ⁶one-⁷two; with the stresses on the first and sixth beats.



The difficulty rests in the fact that although one can pick up the rhythm by itself, when added to a fast-moving and syncopated foot movement the whole thing becomes a meaningless jumble. I spent hours practising the steps and only realised after bitter disappointment that the secret lies in total

disregard of the usually accepted system of European musical phrasing. Bound by rigid rules that subconsciously force us to put a stress on the odd or even beats, we have to become unbound and completely free before these new conceptions of rhythm can be formed. It is no easy matter to decentralise all the clogging ideas that we imbibe as music or dance students, but once having thrown off the Academical Yoke one suddenly wakes up to the conclusion that these so-called undeveloped races have discovered a far higher and complex use of rhythm than we have so far attempted.

Albert took my hand and with a patience that was almost humiliating, showed me the steps over and over again until I found myself doing them without any mental or deliberate effort. Round the room we went, a shop assistant came up to see what the noise was about, so he called to her that she must come and join us. Without the slightest hesitation she took my other hand, and the three of us moved in a silent, stately chain. When we had finished that particular record she begged us to excuse her for a moment, and she reappeared later with cups of coffee.

I enjoyed that afternoon in the music shop, because I was learning more about the technicalities of the dancing than I should ever have discovered in the villages. Here in a quiet room, unhampered by a crowd of staring peasants and my total ignorance of the Greek language, I could ask questions and note down the choreography of the dances. When the party broke up they pressed me to come again whenever I felt inclined to wander in for a talk.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE streets were thronged with people as I walked back to the hotel, for it was growing dark and the street lamps and electric signs were alight. At this hour of the day all Athens comes out to walk about in the cool of the evening. On the pavements the café tables were thronged with chattering men, each with his string of beads or twirling watch chain.

I speculated to myself as to the reason for these toys and came to the conclusion that in the same way as the average Englishman has the sport mania, so the Greek has occupational mania. Unless his hands are perpetually occupied with something to play with and twirl, he feels unhappy and lost. I have watched Englishmen talking to each other by the hour, and unless they are arguing about the Arsenal, or body-line bowling, or perhaps their gardens they would regard themselves as "not ordinary fellows." Introduce such subjects as Eugenics or Religion, and they react like the Greek who has lost his beads.

During my absence John and Maud had made two important decisions. First they intended to leave Greece in two days' time, and they had accepted an invitation to go for a ride to Cap Sunium with some Rumanians staying in the hotel.

"Athens is getting me down," said Maud.

"I want to see the Dalmatian coast on the way home," added John.

"But how are you going to manage that?"

"We have booked two berths in the *Kralica Marija*, she sails on Monday."

"So it's the parting of the ways?" I asked gloomily.

In spite of great differences of opinion and temperament we had together weathered many difficulties; I felt for the first time that our trio had been a wonderful success. I sat on Maud's bed and looked very gloomy.

"Oh, Philip, don't look so sour, you will be delighted to be on your own again when we've gone," Maud taunted me as she busied herself with packing.

"Well, I hope you will be better pleased with the Dalmatian coast than I was, it's vastly overrated, but what about this trip to-morrow?"

They then described how the porter had arranged with a certain Rumanian couple staying in the hotel that we would accompany them to Cap Sunium on the next day. We were to go halves on the expenses and share a car. It sounded an excellent plan, I was intrigued with the idea of going sight-seeing with people we did not even know.

We met on the pavement outside the hotel. The Rumanians were a charming couple, and luckily spoke English. Since we were total strangers each person had to make their own introductions, like the characters in *Through the Looking Glass*. These self-introductions naturally entailed a certain degree of explanatory information being given, as to why we were in Athens, where we lived, and how we spent our lives. Our new friends had come to Athens for a

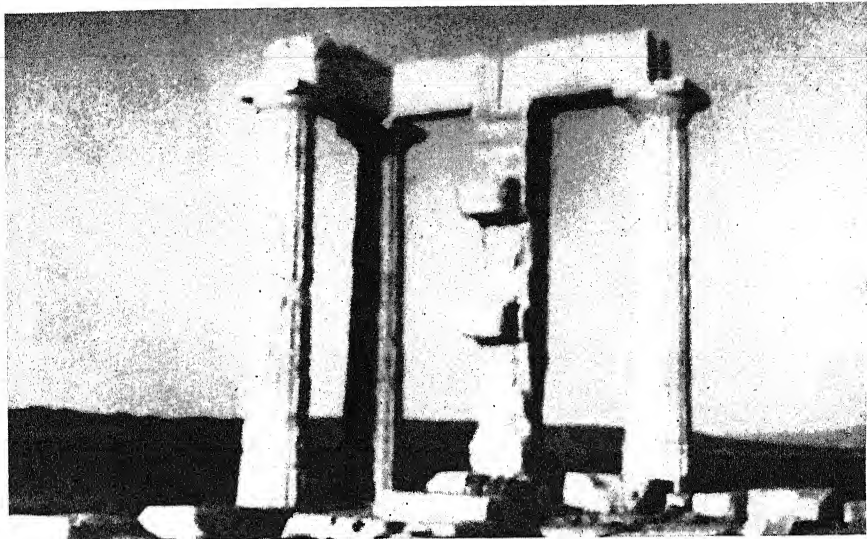
short holiday, they had travelled all over Europe and Morocco. I found myself monopolising the conversation with Madam Constantinescu, who was full of interesting impressions of Fez, Rabat, Marrakesh, and the other towns that had been my home for many months.

The country, as we sped past on one of the few good roads in Greece, was rapidly becoming wilder and less cultivated. In the fields the corn was already scythed and while they worked they sang. The fields at home would have the corn only six inches above the ground, yet it was only a week after Easter.

We passed through several villages. At one of them they were just finished slaughtering an ox in the middle of the main street. It was not a pretty sight, and the chauffeur quickly crossed himself to ward off the ill omen of seeing blood spilt on a Sunday. At many a sharp bend or hidden turning I noticed small shrines, some decorated with bunches of flowers and a flickering lamp.

There were the memorials put up by the relatives of persons killed in fatal accidents. Whenever we came to a particularly bad corner the chauffeur crossed himself and accelerated.

The last six miles of that journey were most unpleasant, for the road had degenerated into an earth track, pitted and trenched with ruts that swallowed up the wheels as far as the axle. We were thrown about like corks in a box. This enforced intimacy had a pleasant effect for by the time we arrived, much shaken and dishevelled, I think that everybody felt that they had known each other for a long time.



" . . . A FEW SLENDER PILLARS AGAINST THE EMERALD SEA. . . . "



MAIN CLOISTER CALDARUȘANI MONASTERY.

Cap Sunium is a place that gives you a strange feeling up your spine the moment you climb the headland and find the few slender pillars standing out against the emerald sea. It affected Byron so powerfully that he resolved to throw in his lot with the Greeks who were fighting for independence. All that remains to-day of the temple that was flourishing when St. Paul sailed past the headland, is a mass of broken masonry and an exquisite group of pillars supporting a few feet of right-angled cornice. They have weathered to a glowing gold streaked in places with broad lines of green and purple that have been splashed on with a giant's brush. All around us, floating on the sea, were the dim shapes of islands, some so far off that they looked transparent against the setting sun, others so near that we could hear the crashing of the breakers pounding against their precipitous sides. A south-easterly wind blew fierce and strong so that one had to fight against it to climb up the temple slope. It was a fitting place for the ancients to have founded a temple where they might worship Poseidon the Lord of the Sea, for his power and majesty were seen at every turn.

As at home in our National Monuments, so also at Sunium there were names carved in the stones of that crumbling temple. Names and dates to commemorate them. I searched among them for the famous Byron signature, and found it boldly carved into the yellow flank of a fallen pediment. Other names were there, the earliest I saw was Thomas Quigley, 1703, and the most recent had been neatly chiselled by Moreton P. Hornblower of Iowa.

Purple Statice grows side by side with white Cistus on the sheltered side of the headland. They look as though they had to fight hard for their existence. I picked a bunch of flowers and put them where I imagined Poseidon's altar must have been, they looked even more beautiful against the yellow stone. I hoped that this gift might please the Powers of the temple, for I had heard very ugly stories about the storms that raged off Cap Sunium, and in a few days I should be passing on the way to Istanboul.

We spent what was left of the daylight in exploring the ruins, but it grew cold and bleak as soon as the sun went down.

The next day was one of chaotic running about from one office to another, and after lunch we drove down to Piræus with the luggage. The passport officials could not understand why I should be with two people who were about to leave Greece with so many bags and suitcases if I had not planned to stage a getaway at the same time. So they forbade me to go anywhere near the ship, and an armed gendarme was detailed to see that these instructions were minutely fulfilled.

On the quayside I said good-bye to Maud and John; they walked up the gangway and disappeared into the ship. With a heavy heart I drove back to Athens and made inquiries at various shipping agents about the possibilities of getting to Bulgaria by sea.

"But nobody has ever wanted to do that trip, all the tourists go to Istanboul or Constantza," said each of the agents in turn.

"Ah, but I'm not a tourist," I would answer with a sly smile.

I spent the evening sitting on the Acropolis with a large map of the Ægean and Black Sea coasts. Somehow there must be a way of getting round to Istanboul and Varna without patronising one of those smelly Greek vessels. Before I left England I had discussed my journey with Professor Dawkins, the authority on Mount Athos. His reminiscences of travelling in Greek coastal ships were so graphic and unpleasant that despite my longing to see the coast and the islands I could not screw up enough courage to go and book a berth on the line that runs from Piræus to Salonica. He told me that on one occasion his cabin stank so badly and was in such a state of disorder that even the green-faced steward, who had lived in such conditions habitually, was forced to burn orange peel before they could brave the atmosphere.

Nor was this experience any exaggeration, for I met an Englishwoman in Athens who told me she had just returned from a specially conducted tour of the islands on what was termed a "first-class ship" at the tourist office. During the three weeks she was at sea the weather was very hot. There were two hundred other sightseers on board, and she was lucky to have managed one tepid bath, for although there were two bathrooms on the ship, only one of them worked. The other was used as a provision store during the tourist season.

I went round to see Albert Leonidas and invite him to dine with me. He was as usual busy in the

subterranean workshop, and said he was delighted to see me, for it gave him an excellent excuse for stopping work. We went to Costi's, the only restaurant in Athens where they really understand other languages besides Greek, and ate a huge meal of national dishes chosen out by Albert. We also drank a fair quantity of delicious amber wine. I have a theory that if you want to eat a big meal of heavy food cooked in fat, it is disastrous to drink water. Large draughts of wine have the effect of stimulating the appetite and accelerating the rate of digestion.

After our meal we felt sufficiently fortified to visit a certain tavern where Albert said we should find *la musique indigène* and plenty of dancing. It had a mysterious and rather threatening exterior, but once inside one instantly caught the spirit of good cheer that seemed to flow as freely as the onion beer that most of the patrons were drinking. I could not manage the onion beer, so we drank cherry cordial.

There was an orchestra of a handful of musicians who played almost incessantly. Anybody could choose a dance time or a popular folk song—they knew them all. Albert went over to the leader of the band and whispered something in his ear, and also greeted several soldiers, boot-blacks and market gardeners whom he knew. It was evidently a place frequented only by these particular professions. Coming back to his seat, he remarked:

"I have asked them to show you a few dances that you would never see outside certain villages in the extreme south-east. Most of the men here to-night come from one particular region."

After a little while the music stopped and re-started again in a style that was unlike anything Albert had ever played to me in his shop. It was full of complex rhythmic phrases and undercurrents of syncopation, rather like an Orientalised version of a fugue. The soldiers and their friends pushed back the tables against the wall to make a space for dancing, and joined up in a chain by interlacing their fingers, with the thumb hanging down. They moved in a counter clockwise direction doing a series of steps and capers that were more graceful and beautiful than anything I had seen, even during the Russalija. The dances went on for over twenty minutes, and ended with a terrific crescendo of sound and movement. Those who were not dancing sat watching with critical eyes and clapped a rhythmic accompaniment to the tune.

I stood a round of onion beers, and we all became friends. It was decided that the next dance would be a Trakenidza Khoros, and that I should dance as number two man—next to the leader—so that I could pick up the steps more easily. The musicians started off with a fast jiggy rhythm in fives
^{1 2 3 4 5}
 (one-two, one, one-two).

The stress falling on the first and fourth beats, this was fairly easy, but I was utterly lost when the leader shouted "*Prossaykhe*"¹ and the whole thing turned into double time adding one beat. This made an eleven rhythm
^{1 2 3 4 5 6}
 (one-two, one, one-two, -three,
^{7 8 9 10 11}
 one-two, one-two-three). Here the stress is on the first, fourth, seventh and ninth beats.

¹ Take care!

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

EXAMPLE 1.



EXAMPLE 2.



I repeatedly fell over, but the men each side of me dragged me up again. It looked as though I was rather spoiling their performance, but they shouted "*Empros*¹—*Empros*," and Albert said that they had not had such an entertainment for years. So far from spoiling their fun, my antics were as good as a Nellie Wallace turn.

I found that the only way to keep up was to make up my own steps so that they fitted the rhythm, and by dint of watching what the dancers were doing, I managed to modify my own version until at last I really was doing the movement correctly. When I found myself able to move without any conscious effort I realised the enormous degree of auto-hypnosis that underline these Greek dances, for one was so completely absorbed in the pleasure of doing a difficult thing properly that all sense of fatigue or time faded away. This type of dancing pumps in fresh energy, but only when you had exhausted all

¹ Go on!

your first supply. Here is something quite unlike ballroom dancing, where the entire balance of values is so distorted by the social instinct that with very rare exceptions the dancers are in a perpetual state of self-consciousness. In the ballroom you dance as two individuals pushing each other round the floor, but at the tavern we danced as one unit of men, so absorbed in what we were doing, that all sense of individualism receded to a point of non-existence.

I am convinced that only when English folk dancers have learned to recapture a little of this peasant directness and forget their nonsensical theories of technique, will they become as genuine as they now are ridiculous to the man in the street.

No sooner had we finished one dance and drunk a round of onion beers than we were off again. I was deeply moved by the simplicity and gentleness of those rough-looking men, who treated me as though they had known me all their lives. All that cold aloofness that had so impressed me on my arrival in Athens was left behind in the streets. For here in the midst of complete strangers I felt far more welcome than I often am at home.

It was getting on for midnight when I arrived back at the hotel, tired but the richer for an experience I might have missed if Maud and John had succeeded in taking me back to Jugoslavia.

I have no idea how long I had been asleep, when there was a clattering of footsteps outside the door and a blinding flash of light which woke me. John marched into the room hatless and dripping wet, he

was followed by Maud. They pulled up their chairs close to the bed and sat down heavily. I asked some sort of explanation of their astonishing appearance and behaviour, and they both at once started to explain that their ship, the *Kralica Marija*, refused to sail as long as they were on board.

The captain had politely told her that the boat had no authority whatever to pick up passengers for Dubrovnik, as it was a cruise trip organised in Trieste, by a Belgian firm. Consequently, if they were caught going ashore with their baggage at any Yugoslav port, not only would they find themselves in prison for attempting to enter Jugoslavija in an illegal fashion, but also the captain would be due to pay an enormous tax for landing them. No passengers had the right to disembark in Jugoslavija if they were members of a cruise that started in Italy.

After two completely unsuccessful attempts to board another vessel, also bound for the Dalmatian coast, they had been arrested and detained for some hours in Piræus harbour. Maud's description of how she had been told by the official on duty—so drunk he could not stand—that she would have to spend the night under his care, was a masterpiece of mimicry. I buried my head in the pillows and laughed till I wept.

"You know he had got to the stage of drunkenness when he repeated everything I said, and made fish-like movements with his mouth."

"And when Maud asked for her dressing-case," added John, "they refused to let her so much as open it to get out a clean hanky."

"But I not only opened it, but refused to leave the quayside without it—and here it is." She waved her case triumphantly.

"And where is the rest of your stuff?" I asked.

"They have impounded the whole lot. We shall have to go down again to-morrow and fetch it. I'm going to make such a row over this affair that all Athens will hum like a hive," said Maud bitterly.

John discovered a bag of biscuits and some chocolate on the table. So they ate them, for they had not seen food since midday. I rang the bell and Washey-Washey appeared very sleepy-eyed and blinking at the new arrival in amazement.

"You come again see me? Yeaays? Thought you all go. No leaving?"

I explained in French, as I could not at that hour have gone through the usual performance in English. She shuffled off rather incredulously to get their beds ready.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE next day we made Athens hum, as Maud had predicted. We visited the head of the Docks Police, and made a great show of the *laissez passer* that I had been granted for the cameras and instruments, adding that the drunken official had insulted people whom the government was pleased to invite to the country. Then in great pomp we walked over to the customs house and did our act with greater violence, adding that we had lodged protests with our Legation in Athens, and would only be satisfied with a written apology from the official who had man-handled Maud when she refused to be parted from her dressing-case.

The general effect was rather gratifying, particularly when I kept rubbing in the bit about our *laissez passer* and the protest at the Legation. I wish Maud's French had been more fluent; I feel she did not do herself justice. They hastened to get out our bags and looked even more silly when it was discovered that the man in charge of the keys had gone off for a drink. We waited twenty minutes till he returned, and then launched off again into further invective.

A man who was a dirty yellow with fright asked us to sign a receipt for the luggage, but we refused as I thought we might be on the edge of a trap to sign a statement saying it was all our fault. The

final touch was at the harbour gates. They were actually going to charge us for letting the bags pass the barrier. I walked back and found Yellowface, who told the gatekeepers to mind their own business and get rid of us as quickly as possible.

The next port of call was the Agents who had booked them on that boat. We handed them a bill for four trips to and from Piræus, and told them that we had lodged a complaint with the Yugoslav consul who had recommended us to go to their agency as representing his country's interests.

They looked at the bill with contempt, but when we put a threefold and simultaneous barrage of complaint in English, French and German, harping on all our own strings and a few new ones as well, they reimbursed Maud without further hesitation. The Trump Card was Maud's threat to report the whole affair in detail to the Greek Press Bureau in Athens, and charge the agents with having deliberately issued tickets which they knew to be worthless and illegal.

Wellington himself could not have felt greater satisfaction after Waterloo than we experienced when, with snivelling excuses, the agents paid up the expenses and promised to book special accommodation on the next available boat.

We went off to have a wonderful lunch to celebrate the Victory of Piræus Harbour, and drove out to see the Marathon Dam in the afternoon.

They have called by this name the dam because it has a publicity value, and exciting associations. The traditional battlefield of Marathon is over eight

miles from the dam. Surrounded by scenery that reminded us of Surrey rather than Greece, the great reservoir stretches out like a sheet of amethyst set between hills of green and brown. There is a natural rock garden when the dam blocks the gully, planted out, I suspect, by the Englishmen who worked there for years installing the machinery. At the very foot of that towering white wall of rock there is a little temple, a very simple memorial to perpetuate the names of those men who worked that Athens might have clean drinking water. Every man who had some share in putting up that dam has his name engraved on the Sanctuary walls.

On the way back we passed through a town called Kephissia, where the Athenians spend the summer months. Maud decided she was fed up with Athens and that the next day she was going to move out to Kephissia with John. So they left me in Athens alone, because I had to get something fixed up for my departure and also get the visas for the countries I intended to visit. The Rumanian consulate refused to visa my passport because they said it would be wiser to get it done in Istanboul. Knowing nothing of their real reasons for this action I politely thanked them and went to the Bulgarian visa. Going into Bulgaria is no joke. You have to state precisely where you intend to enter the country, the date of your arrival, and where you intend to stay. Your visit must not exceed a week. They warn you that you are furthermore liable to drastic treatment if they catch you trying to change any currency outside the walls of the National Bank,

and that if you forget to register with the police and stay longer than your seven days the usual reward is a month in jail.

Whilst I was waiting in the office at the Bulgarian Consul an American was shown into the room. We started talking and discovered that we had mutual friends. He was in Athens with his wife; they were going into the Black Sea in a Dutch cargo boat, and it sailed in three days' time. Naturally, I asked a lot of questions about this vessel and what her accommodation was like, hoping that at last Heaven had sent a solution to my difficulties. But he was very cautious. I think he scented a rat, and did not want me to know too much in case I took the berth from under his nose.

That afternoon I went down to Piræus and combed the docks until I found the ship. She was a fair-sized cargo boat lying in the Free Dock. I noted the name and the line, and went back to Piræus to search for the offices of the agents. They told me that Mr. Caruthers S. Kemraker and wife had provisionally booked the only available accommodation, and that there were three other passengers. The ship called at Volos, Smyrna, Istanboul, Burgas, Varna and Constantza. I vainly tried to hide my excitement. Could I have first refusal of the berth and how much would the trip cost? They seemed very doubtful about the Kemrakers' booking, because Mrs. Kemraker found that the ship's winches worked at certain hours of the day when she was in the habit of either working or sleeping. From the agents' description she spent her entire day doing one or the other of

these things, and since silence was indispensable for both functions, she had small chances of finding the ship's atmosphere congenial.

Nothing daunted, I went straight to the address that Kemraker had given us and told him that I had been down to see the ship and the agents. He went off to call his wife.

She was a neurotic looking woman of late middle age, and told me that she and "hubby" had made an extensive tour of Asia Minor and hoped to go on to the Black Sea. They were getting stuff together for geographical articles, and had taken miles of films for their American audiences. Mrs. K. was evidently a well-known figure in the lecturing world on the other side of the Atlantic. I painted a very black picture of the ship's winches, saying that I had heard of cases where persons unused to their wearing sound had been driven insane on the third day out to sea. Being Americans they were duly impressed, and the outcome of my interview was that Mrs. K. phoned the agent and cancelled their passage. My fate was sealed.

That evening I drove to Kephissia to meet Maud and John at their hotel, and broke the news, "I am going to leave for the Black Sea on Sunday afternoon."

"And *we* are going to leave the same day," replied John. For they had at last fixed their passages to Dubrovnik.

We spent those last two days walking about the countryside, and picking the wild flowers. On the Saturday, despite the very stormy weather it was

decided we would climb Mount Pentelicus, which stood up behind the hotel like a grey giant with his head in the clouds. As usual I overslept, and they started without me. This meant that for the first two miles I had to run at a steady jog-trot up a gradient of one in five before I caught up to them.

It was a long way, but a beautiful one. The first four miles were through olive and oak woods that grew in a soft crumbly red earth. Higher up the woods faded out and the path became a precipitous zigzag. About two-thirds of the way up there is a vast quarry where hundreds of men are at work cutting up the stone into slabs and blocks for building. The stone is pale pink like a baby's ear when newly quarried, and turns either to a biscuit colour or to creamy white when it has been weathered.

I gathered thirty-six different flowers on the way to the quarries, and put the bunch in a stream to keep fresh for the return journey. There were several sorts of orchids and cistus growing at the height of two thousand feet. One orchid I have never seen in any book. It had sparse washed-out blue flowers, growing on a pale stem over 18 inches long. The leaves were narrow and spotted with purple.

It took the whole morning to climb Pentelicus, and we arrived at the barren, wind-swept summit after crossing the last mile of small stones and occasional tufts of coarse grass. The view was the reward of our efforts. Although it was a sunless day one could see a great panorama of mountains, islands and sea. To the north-east lay the grey isle of

Chalchis, separated from the mainland by a narrow band of silver water, scarcely wider than a finger. Beyond, to the north were ranges of hills, some palest grey and yellow, some as purple as a ripe damson, and nearer, at our feet, grass with green and brick red where the soil showed it had been recently ploughed. Above was a grey sky, heavy with rain clouds that drove in across the Corinth Canal. For a few moments we could see Cap Sunium like a tongue pushed out of the mainland into the dark and heavy sea. But clouds soon blotted out the ground to the south.

We sat down and ate our frugal meal of bread, eggs and fruit. Nobody spoke, for it was not a place for conversation. I think that each of us felt the presence of something unaccountably eerie. For next to Mount Olympus, this spot was most sacred in the mythology of the Ancients, who were convinced that certain Powers lived at the top of Pentelicus.

There was not much time for musing, for in another twenty minutes we should have been completely cut off from the world down below by a thick wet mist which was rapidly falling. In fact, for the first part of the descent, we raced the clouds that piled up behind us, blotting out the top of the mountain completely. I had forgotten where I had placed my bunch of flowers, but we had no time to look for them at the quarry.

Just as we reached the hotel the heavens opened and a deluge of rain poured down. It poured for the rest of the evening, and the next day it was still

pouring when we drove to Piræus for the last time. As we drew up at the quay side the rain stopped as abruptly as if God had turned off a tap. The sun came through the clouds and dried the steaming pavements.

"It is a good omen, this sunlight breaking upon our parting," I said to Maud and John as they walked up the gangway and were gone.

An hour later I was standing on the bridge of the cargo boat *Eulysses*, watching Piræus and Athens, with her Acropolis, fade away in the warm afternoon haze.

PART III

MAY-JULY, 1936

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

My fellow passengers were three Dutch women who were making the trip for various reasons. One was the widow of a Government official in Java, and spoke excellent English, the second was going to visit friends in Istanboul, and the third was simply on board for her health. She sat next to me at meals and bored the rest of us with the most inane and stupid conversation I have ever heard. This may have been due in part to the fact that she was suffering from an acute inferiority complex which manifested itself in her desire to say nothing that could be taken seriously, for fear of an argument. Mercifully my knowledge of Dutch is not great, so half her jokes simply floated over my head and I was not required to laugh.

This irritating chattiness poured out of an ugly, loose mouth. The general effect if you looked at her suddenly was of a hunted rabbit wearing a badly-fitted wig of tawny horse-hair. As the voyage progressed, I arrived at such a state of exasperation with these torrents of triviality that I carried on a conversation in French with the Passenger for Istanboul. She was also irritated to a pitch of witty vindictiveness; together we made the most outrageous remarks about Passenger 3—as she was

dubbed. The Lady from Java—a gracious person of infinite understanding—occasionally joined in our conversation, but on the whole she did her best to tolerate Passenger 3 with a good heart.

The captain, chief engineer and first officer sat with us at meals. They were a curious trio. Captain Van Oss had a blue-red nose and watery eyes. He never took off his hat unless eating lunch—for the other meals he wore it. I think he also slept in some sort of hat, because his scalp was a deathly white like the top of a fungus, while the face under the hat made up for this deficiency of colour with brick-red and brown. Nothing pleased him. God had created a world of imperfections, and nearly all of them could be found on the ship.

The Chief Engineer was short and fat. He had an unquenchable thirst for weak tea and a wonderful capacity for eating slabs of bread spread with raw fish or ham. His fellow-worker, the Chief Officer, looked like the Medici reproductions of William the Taciturn, and had a voice that was coarse and deafening. Special food had to be prepared for him on account of a chronic gastric ulcer.

The ship, like most things that belong to the Dutch, was clean and comfortable. My berth was a double one, rather stuffy, but so placed that I could see everything that was going on outside, for it had two portholes, one looking out to sea and the other with a view of the bridge. After five weeks of highly-spiced and greasy food, the meals on board seemed insipid. We had one compensation—fresh butter and new-baked bread. For the most part we

were served with cheese and cooked meats. Once in the ten days on board we had a cauliflower; apart from that our only vegetables were potatoes and dried beans.

On the first evening, as the sun lit up the coast from the east, we were to pass Cape Sunium just before sunset. I climbed the up companion-way and stood on the lower bridge, looking for that headland where we had spent such a happy time. From the sea it is often rather difficult to pick out landmarks unless you know the coast, because you see things from a completely new angle. At last I saw a group of short, golden rods driven into the purple cliff. Through field-glasses those golden rods became the scattered pillars of the temple.

I stood there and watched the light slowly fade away until at last there was nothing except the great mass of the mainland, standing out black and silhouetted against the pale sky. In a few minutes it was completely dark, and the stars came out one by one. Were Maud and John looking at the stars on the other side of the Corinth Canal? Perhaps they had already forgotten me in the excitements of their new venture.

After supper the Lady from Java produced a pack of cards and we played whist. There was some difficulty in getting Passenger 3 to grasp the game. She would trump her partner's cards and revoked with systematic regularity whenever they looked like losing a game. I began to suspect her affected exterior of stupidity. People who are as crafty in their first game of whist are no fools. Throughout

the trip, whenever it grew rough we always played cards, it has a wonderful power of keeping the mind off the fear of sickness.

At six the next morning we were anchored in Volos harbour, discharging a small quantity of cargo. Volos looked like a fairyland port in the early-morning light. There is a green slope of hills rising up behind the New Town, and behind the hills is Mount Pelion, standing like a wall over 5,000 feet high. The Captain told me that Volos was the cleanest port on the whole Greek coast. With its gay, yellow buildings and vermilion roofs it invited exploration, but we were under way within two hours. I resolved that somehow I should go to Volos again, even if it means waiting for years before finding a way to Greece.

In time of war the harbour at Volos would make a perfect naval base. It is shut in and guarded from the outside by an arm of land that curls round so completely that vast fleets of ships could be hidden from the outside world. But I suppose the day of fleets has passed. A newspaper in Athens had said that the entire British Mediterranean fleet could be held in check by twenty large bombing craft, if the Italians had chosen to strike at Malta during those tense days when Sanctions nearly precipitated bloodshed.

Late that evening we passed Mount Olympus, snow capped and gleaming pink against the dark-blue sky. Only the top of the mountain was lit by the sun and the lower part was wrapped in a thick mist. No wonder the Ancients were convinced that

here lived the Gods. Any man who suddenly walks out of his cabin door as I did and sees that gigantic pile rearing up majestically and aloof, must be overawed by the sight. Even the Captain remarked, "I have seen Olympus over a hundred times, yet each fresh sight of it tells me that the Great God is not far from the place."

Saint Paul must have seen Olympus several times in his voyages; perhaps it gave him ideas for some of those sermons. At least, I like to think his harsh, unbending Christianity was sometimes touched by the beauty of such a sight.

Just after supper we tied up in Salonica dock, and I went ashore for a walk in the town. There were little knots of men standing about in the half-shadows of the streets near the waterfront and an atmosphere of suspicion. I noticed that each group of men had scouts posted so that a warning could be whistled if the police were sighted.

Salonica was swept by an undercurrent of political unrest whilst we were passing through some weeks before, but that evening one could feel the tension in the air like the beginnings of a thunderstorm.

I bought a local newspaper printed in French and read that workers deliberately defying the Police order which forbids street meetings, were liable to instant arrest. "*Le directeur de la police, M. Dacos, avait adopté une serie de mesures pour maintenir l'ordre. Les postes de police ont été renforcés par détachments militaires.*" So they had called in the help of the army. Perhaps the forecast of those

young officers in the train were coming true sooner than they themselves had imagined.

I drank several cups of coffee and read the other newspapers that littered the table. In one of them I learned that Decazos, the Minister of National Economy, was expected to arrive in Salonica in a day's time in order to parley with the strikers. The infuriating thing was that not one paper gave the slightest account of why the men wanted to strike or what were their grievances. Perhaps the Greek mind does not bother about such trifles. The strike was evidently the important thing, its origins were not worthy of mention.

Next day they started unloading the ship as fast as possible. Two soldiers with rifles stood on guard at the warehouse entrance. Captain Van Oss was in a fever of suspense for at any moment he expected to be stranded with half his Salonica cargo left in the holds. But in spite of all this excitement and possibility of a scene on the quayside, everything was going like clockwork when we left the ship. I had promised to take the other three to a certain antique shop where they could buy what Passenger 3 called "Pretty things vor peoples at home."

I left them at the antique shop and went off to get a Rumanian visa. We were to meet in two hours and have lunch together. I walked along the Odos Constantine, and noticed that although the streets were full of people many of the shops were still shut and boarded up. At the end of the street I saw the reason. A mob of strikers carrying slogans printed on banners came marching down the street.

They were quite orderly in their behaviour and looked as though very intent on business.

The visa had to wait. I followed at the back of the procession, and marched towards a big cinema called the Pantheon where several other detachments had already arrived. A fiery individual with a depraved and dissipated expression was haranguing the crowd. He looked as though he would cheerfully cut the throat of any boss for ten drachmæ. I wished that I could understand the things he said, but they made the crowd hoot with laughter.

During his oration a squad of armed police arrived and a slim, dignified man walked with them. Somebody explained to me that it was Nico Korfiati, the procurator. He appealed to the strikers to go home without any further disturbance, and promised that their case would be properly looked into by the authorities. A bottle was thrown at the speaker when he turned to go. I scented a street riot, and retired to a safer spot, but apart from two arrests, nothing more happened. The strikers moved away looking rather sheepish and crestfallen.

There was just enough time to collect a bargain made the previous night—two thousand leva¹ for three English pound-notes—and afterwards race back to the antique shop. I managed to get to the money-changer's office fairly easily, but the entire street near the antique shop was jammed with strikers who were now anything but orderly in their behaviour. I simply trod on the feet of the people who got in my way, and fought a passage through

¹ A wonderful price, for in Bulgaria the leva costs (aprox.) 415 for £1.

the bodies of the excited men. One man threatened me with a knife so I punched him on the windpipe. Cowering in a shop entrance the three Dutch women thought their last hour had come, but I think they rather enjoyed the experience. We walked straight back to the harbour and went on board.

The Captain was standing with a handkerchief tied round his head, watching the last bales being carried into the warehouse.

"What time do we sail, Captain?" I asked.

"When these heathen monkeys get us free of the cargo," he replied, without taking his eyes off the quayside.

The Chief Engineer remarked at lunch that this was not the first occasion when they had experienced difficulty at Salonica over strikes.

"They have a strike to celebrate May Day, not because they wish for more moneys. We are lucky because there is not much cargo to-day, otherwise we might be stuck here for many days."

We moved off from the harbour just as a disturbance started at the Dock Gates. I could see police and soldiers outnumbered by the men who were trying to break into a Tobacco Shed. Another quarter of an hour longer at that dockside and we might have been in the plight that the Chief Engineer had described.

The ship steamed out towards Olympus and the open sea. Behind, the wake of white foam the coast receded, flat and green against the dull-grey sea. I could see two of the three headlands, Cassandra and Longos—Mount Athos was too far off. When I had

started from England I had hoped to visit Mount Athos to see for myself what those monasteries and their inhabitants were really like. But like so many travellers' fancies, it is a trip I have yet to make, although I spent a whole day getting the necessary recommendations and visas from the Ecclesiastical Authorities in Athens. The voyage to Smyrna—or rather it should now be called Izmir—was not pleasant. I do not think we others felt the heavy swell, but we had to play whist with great concentration in order to keep Passenger 3 from being ill. The Ægean Sea is a treacherous, moody stretch of water, a gale blew up in a few minutes off the coast of Mytelene and waves broke right over the decks. Since I had to go aft to my cabin, all thought of going to bed was out of the question. I sat up, chatting with the Passenger for Istanboul. We drank coffee and ate biscuits and exchanged confidences of a most intimate nature. How strange the effect of storm can have on different people. Some retire to be ill while others sit and talk. The saloon door crashed open and a gust of damp, salt air blew into the room—I got up to close it and was promptly hurled across the floor, narrowly missing the polished brass corner of the sideboard and cutting my head on an iron bracket that stuck out of the panelling near the door.

When I got back to my seat after fighting with the wind that threatened to tear the door off its hinges, we improvised a bandage with a handkerchief and some tape. As she tied me up, the woman suddenly said in a very matter-of-fact

voice, "I am very puzzled about something; perhaps you, as a young man, may see a way out of my dilemma—for it concerns a person who is not much older than you."

"Well, I am only too pleased to listen," I replied, wondering what was coming next. She looked at me fixedly in silence for a while and then started to describe her early life in Rotterdam and how, when the war started, she entered the pay of the Allies' spy system in order to help the transit of escaped prisoners through Holland. "And in 1917, as the War was finishing, I found that I had fallen in love with a man whose behaviour had excited so much suspicion that he was one day caught in France and shot—as a spy for the Germans. My evidence could have saved him, but I never gave it."

"What made you keep silence—did you really love him?" I interrupted.

"I hope so, for it has been like a gnawing growth in my imagination. I have had no peace of mind for nearly twenty years. My only justification is the consideration that if he had not died, some dozens of other men would inevitably have been caught escaping from these prison camps."

She passed a hand over her forehead and wiped off the fine beads of sweat that stood out against the pallid skin. I watched the nervous movements of the fingers and knew that her mind was making a terrific effort to get the rest of the events into some sort of coherence. For it was obvious that she was compelled to tell me the whole story. The situation was saved by the gale. Bang went the door and

crashed back against the panelling. I bolted it firmly. "That's fixed the door," I shouted, and sat down.

The calm and self-composure had returned, I was thankful the door had opened.

"Do you wish to hear the rest—or does it bore you?"

"Do I look bored?"

She laughed. "Not exactly bored, dirty and blood-stained if you like. Now, some time ago I went for a trip to our Colonies in the East, Java and Sumatra, and met a man who was due to come back on leave. We toured all over the place together and fell in love on the way back to Holland. He is fifteen years younger than I am. We lived together—you understand me?"

"Yes—I do."

"Then his work was changed. They sent him to Turkey—in three days we shall meet at Istanboul and I am to stay for a few weeks in his flat."

"So that explains your presence on the ship?"

"Partly. But the problem is that I shall have to decide whether to sacrifice our love for the purposes of warning him against a woman who I happen to know is a Russian Soviet spy and is using his brain and social circle for her own ends."

"You are certain of this?"

"Not only am I certain, for reasons that we need not discuss, but I fully realise that the woman means nothing much to him, and he can only interpret any action on my part as being petty jealousy. Men hate jealous women more than they hate unfaithful ones."

The hurricane lamps swung and creaked on their hooks and we ate biscuits in silence.

"It would be easy to warn him if they meant anything to each other—but they don't. What would *you* do?"

"Quite frankly, I should say is the young man worth all this distress? And if I decided he was not, then I should risk saying what was on my mind. Otherwise I should simply wait and see what the spy woman has got out of him. How much does he mean to you?"

"Is any woman able to tell you in words how much her lover means to her? I think I love him enough to warn him in spite of the fact that he will turn from me for doing so."

"That's exactly what I mean. If you are convinced of his reaction being so shortsighted, then I should not have bothered to cross the Mediterranean to be greeted by such a worthless creature."

"You are brutal, Mr. Thornton—perhaps you are right."

"I am sorry, but please remember you asked me to say what I thought."

At that moment a frenzied crashing started on the saloon door. I got up and unbolted it. The Lady from Java lurched into the room, dragging with her Passenger 3 who was a ghastly sight in her nightdress and dressing-gown.

"Quick, hold her—she has threatened to throw herself overboard," said the Lady from Java, who was almost soaked to the skin and half-undressed. "It

is the sea-sickness, she was like this in the Bay of Biscay. I must go and put on some dry clothes."

She disappeared and I helped Passenger 3 into a chair. We covered her up with the voluminous cloth from the saloon-table and waited, staring at each other blankly like three people in a Pirandello play.

"I have some cognac in my cabin. Shall I get you some?" I asked.

She either did not understand or else felt too ill to reply. The storm was slackening down every minute and the wind had dropped.

"In a short time it will be calm," said the Passenger for Istanbul reassuringly, and patted the ashy, freckled hands of the woman sprawling prostrate across the table. We waited another quarter of an hour then and carried Passenger 3 back to her berth. It was quite light and the rising sun lit up the great hills behind the Gulf of Sandarlik, making them look an almost transparent grey against the pale-yellow sky. Mytelene lay behind us, floating on the sea, green and mysterious.

I climbed into my bunk and slept till noon.

One of the fascinations of voyaging by sea is the magic way in which you seem to drift overnight from one portion of the world to another. The day before, we were in Greece—253 miles away—now we were steaming into the Ismir Gulf—a new sort of scenery surrounded us, belonging to a totally different nation from the Greeks. The sea was as calm as the proverbial mill-pond and so still that you could see the dolphins playing deep in the blue water. They chased each

other round the ship, sometimes leaping several feet into the air. There were enormous jelly-fishes too, that heaved about near the surface and spread out their long, filmy tentacles if you threw them a piece of meat. Twice I saw Nautilus (I believe they are properly called "Portuguese Men of War") it just looked like a highly-coloured picture I had seen on a cigarette-card with its "rigging" of orange and magenta filaments sticking out of the water.

Our speed became so slow that the coast seemed to move past as though we were anchored. The Turks are rather fussy about the course of shipping up the Ismir Gulf because they do not wish foreigners to go anywhere near the fortified parts of the coast.

Towards midday we sighted Ismir lying in a faint haze six miles away. The town first appears as a jumble of tiny white houses sprinkled over the flank of a sharp slope, shut in completely by hills on every side. Slowly the modern buildings on the foreshore appear, and the bulbous dome of an Ex-Greek Cathedral pushes its marble head into the air. One can see in a moment from this panoramic view why that disastrous fire destroyed the town in 1921, for the waterfront is so completely exposed and shut off by the hills, that once a fire started it would be hopeless to try to put it out.

A smart, red, motor-launch, bearing Turkish Customs and Harbour officials, came buzzing out when the ship came nearer the port. They circled round twice and came aboard almost before we had dropped anchor, anxious to get their jobs done,

because it was May Day and therefore a Public Holiday. All four passengers were inspected by a crafty-looking man calling himself the Port Doctor. He asked if the bandage round my head was for any infectious disease before granting the passengers permission to go ashore for a walk. A man with waxed moustachios three inches long laboriously wrote down in a massive book that my injury was a lawful and normal one and that I had permission to go ashore. The solemnity of that gathering in the saloon was somewhat marred by the Doctor's hiccoughs which came on whenever he was about to make a dynamic observation. The party returned in their flashy motor-boat as soon as the Captain treated each member to a cheroot.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I ENJOYED that evening spent in Smyrna. Modernism has banished the Fez and the veil and the baggy trousers, but it will not easily destroy the quietness of the deserted streets and the dreamy beauty of flowering trees that grow in the mosque courtyards. Since the new law that has forbidden the use of Classical Turkish lettering and enforced the Latin alphabet, the shopkeepers and merchants have attempted to write up their signs in accordance with the Government's regulations. An old dog cannot learn new tricks; the chaos and bewilderment that this new lettering has engendered is apparent at every turn. When the shop signs were written up in that lovely, flowing script, a foreigner with a knowledge of the Arabic alphabet could read the lettering, but to-day he is often greeted with an unintelligible jumble of Latin letters, some written upside down, and others back to front.

Near the centre of the town stands a mosque with a beautiful fountain where the worshippers wash themselves before prayer. There is something very inviting about the place. I took off my shoes and walked in to sit in the cool shadows of the great building.

The interior was much less austere than some of the mosques I have visited in Morocco. Thick carpets of every shape and colour lined the floors,

and the entire roof was painted with the Sacred names of God.

Unlike the Christians, the Moslems have made their temples look like the dwelling of an intensely human God—houses that an ordinary man can visit and feel that he is really at home. They have not cluttered the ground with prayer-desks and choir stalls, because the congregation sit there and please themselves when they pray and when they meditate. There are no images and ikons—for the Koran forbids the idolatrous representation of any living thing. Mustapha Kemal has already aimed a great blow against the Islamic faith by unveiling the women, and his open and free consumption of alcohol and encouragement of films and theatricals is still regarded as a blasphemous betrayal of the Faith by the older generation, many of whom fought with him for the liberty of Turkey. At least, that is what a grey-haired man told me as we sat and chatted in the courtyard. He had worked for the English Consulate in the old days before the Greeks were driven out, and spoke excellent French. "They were the cleverest farmers and traders that Ismir will ever see, everything they touched prospered and bore fruit. Naturally when the day came that they were to be driven out of the town that had become as Greek as Athens, they set fire to the place and perished in hundreds." He looked at me with piercing grey eyes and added, "Who can blame them—they worked like slaves to produce their gold—for destroying their houses rather than let us occupy them."

I suggested that we should go and drink coffee. All the books I had read about post-war Turkey gave the impression that the inhabitants were united in their hatred of the Greeks—yet here was a man of obvious intelligence and culture who regretted their passing. Does anybody know for certain what other Nations think?

My presence with Abdul Çazik at the café led to a friend of his coming up and greeting us. Unfortunately the friend spoke nothing but Turkish, but we managed to talk about a great many things. This man was much younger than Abdul Çazik, and a member of the new regime, but he had no kind words for the Ghazi or the Turkish Government. His business was in precious metals and stones. The shop was very near—would I care to see some? Naturally I was delighted with the invitation. We finished the coffee and walked a few yards down a street that was shut in from the sky by a trellis-work of vines and creepers. The heat of summer would be unbearable in those narrow, confined streets but for the shade from the trellises.

Two younger brothers of the family sat in the shop. They rose to greet us and as usual one of them went off for coffee and cakes whilst I was shown the trays of precious stones and gold ornaments. Most of the jewels were emeralds, rubies and sapphires. I asked if they had any moonstones for sale. A bag was pulled out of a hole in the wall and from it they ladled out into my hat thousands of topaz, moonstones and fiery opals. Some were minute stones, others as big as a farthing. "Take your pick and

name a price," said the eldest brother. I looked out a dozen perfect moonstones and half a dozen opals, placing them on a scrap of notepaper. In London they would have cost ten or twelve guineas. After we had drunk a round of coffee, during which I said that he must name a price, it was agreed that I should pay 225 piastres!¹ Moments such as these are precious in the memory of any traveller.

With a sense of satisfaction that lightened each step, I walked back to the ship and showed my catch to the other passengers. The stones were much admired, and even the lugubrious Passenger 3 said that she would like to visit the shop whilst the cargo was being unloaded next day.

So we set off early in the row-boat that served the ship as a ferry. The shaven heads of men shone like grey, polished steel in the morning sun, as they pushed at the long oars. In Turkey they row facing the direction the boat is to go—this is not the only thing they do backwards for you nod your head to say "No" and wag it to the right to say "Yes."² Until the edict forbidding the Classical Script they also wrote backwards.

I found the shop after some difficulty and introduced my party to the smiling man who promptly ordered coffee and asked us all to sit down. When the coffee arrived Passenger 3 refused to drink hers, saying in her hollow, dead tones, "Ve all shall boizoned be, if der coffee ve trinks." "Oh, no, you must drink it," I replied, and when she added

¹ 310 piastres = 10/-

² The Greeks add to this confusion by saying 'Ney' for 'Yes'!

further inanities I added with studied unconcern, "Of course, you *need* not drink it, but he will be furious and so insulted that I cannot answer for your safety. Sometimes they have peculiar ways of showing their dislike of rude foreigners."

She drank the coffee without further delay.

I left them to their bargaining and walked up the steep streets towards the fort that commands a wonderful view of the bay. From the deck it looked no distance but I must have climbed at least three miles of painful track before I reached the top. A notice warned visitors in Greek, Turkish, German and French that anybody caught photographing the view without a special licence might find himself in prison.

Three women were washing clothes at a nearby fountain. All that showed from where I sat were three none too shapely behinds draped in trousers of vivid Japanese printed cotton. These curious hulks never moved even though the women pounded and slapped with great spirit. I regretted the notice about photography being prohibited.

On the way back to the ship I bought a cauliflower and some small oranges that afterwards turned out to be so bitter that even the Cook's parrot, a dreary creature called Marcus, refused to sample them.

About half an hour before we were due to sail, I went to watch the cargo men hoisting up bales of dried skins from a lighter. These skins were untanned raw-hide folded in half and done up in bales weighing a ton each. They looked like enormous

packets of dirty-brown cardboard. The Turks are Fatalists and have a blind trust in things as they appear. Consequently the men took for granted that the flimsy iron bands that held the hides together would be quite adequate as anchorage for inserting hoist-hooks.

One bale was carried up without mishap—so also was the second. Encouraged by his success, the man in the lighter below suddenly took it into his head to send up two bales on one hook.

The bulky load hovered for a second and then, with a salvo of sharp cracks, every band gave way—the hides crashed down in all directions. Most of them fell into the sea but were recovered. This accident was the making of the afternoon. A fantastic Babel of tongues broke loose. I heard orders shouted in Dutch, Turkish, English, German and Greek. The two soldiers who had been stationed on the ship put down their rifles and ran to see what had happened whilst the Chief Engineer stood on the boat-deck just above the lighter and cursed the men, the harbour and the hides in terms that made the air seem full of venom.

It is curious how people in a crisis all blame each other while the results of their stupidity grow worse and less repairable as they talk. Had there been less shouting and more action, none of the hides need have fallen into the harbour. When he noticed that the bands had snapped, the man in charge of the winch started hoisting at a terrific speed, thereby jolting the remaining hides into the water. I laughed until tears ran down my face. The whole

scene was exactly like the incredible buffoonery of Laurel and Hardy.

After an hour's delay, we left for Istanboul. The sea was calm and strangely black. At midnight we entered the Dardanelles; in the clear moonlight both coasts were plainly visible. Only a few miles of water separate Asia Minor from Europe. The next morning we were lying in the great harbour at Istanboul.

Men have written wonderful descriptions of the Golden Horn, of the Agia Sophia and Blue Mosque standing on that hillside overlooking the busy waters of the Bosphorus. As a child I had a wonderful picture of Constantinople—a place of dreams and magic, of wonderful treasures and mysteries. Naturally I expected a city of great beauty.

But all dreamers have their awakening, and Istanboul was as repulsive and disheartening to me as Manchester in February. A thin, penetrating drizzle blotted out most of the buildings and a N.E. wind blew from the Black Sea, driving the rain about the streets in bitter gusts. Towards the afternoon the rain stopped and I went ashore with my friend the Passenger for Istanboul.

She fully expected the young man to have sent some sort of message saying that he would meet her, and we were even more surprised when the ship's agents in Istanboul had received no inquiries from him about the day or hour of her arrival. After an interminable wait whilst the Customs men wrote down a list of particulars about the luggage, and the officials copied down a mass of data from

the passport, we were at last allowed to get into a taxi. The men who had carried the luggage from the quay to the taxi demanded a fabulous fee for their services. I gave them a handful of small change amounting to a sixth of their price and we drove off to Pera amid a torrent of abuse.

The flat was in a block of buildings at the top of the hill overlooking the western half of Istanboul. I was introduced to the young man who seemed delighted to see her and was quite pleasant to me. But there was a tension in the air that was unmistakable—quite obviously all was not as it should be—so after a brief cup of tea I left them alone and walked back to the ship feeling cold and miserable.

Next morning I took part in one of the most tantalising and ludicrous interviews that often fall to the lot of a traveller. It arose out of two very simple and innocuous things that I wanted to do in the city. First, I needed to cash some money from my letter of credit. Second, it was imperative for me to go and obtain a Rumanian visa.

Naturally my passport was essential for either of these errands. Now the regulations for transit visitors to Turkey appear to be even more rigid than the precautions taken by the Yugoslav authorities on that memorable day in Djevdjelija when John was arrested. On no account could I walk about Istanboul with my passport. The regulations were there in black and white. Could not I read simple French?

"But of course," I agreed, "you must realise

that I only want my passport to go straight to the bank and from there to the Rumanian Consulate for a visa?"

"Quite out of the question!" said the Commissar at the quay several times and smiled indulgently as one does if a child asks to play with a new razor.

In desperation I went to the Agents. A handsome bribe was all that was necessary and the Agent went with me to tell the Commissar that he had known me all his life and could guarantee my good conduct in Istanboul.

"Ah—well, now that is quite another matter," said the Commissar still smiling, and ordered coffee whilst a subordinate cross-examined me and took all the particulars about my movements past, present and future.

"M'sieur may have his passport but he will have to consent to being followed by—a'hem—an official escort as long as he carries it on his person," explained the Commissar when all the formalities were over. Nobody hurries in Turkey except at the wrong moment. An hour later I was in the bank.

"But I cannot give you this money because your letter of credit has not been stamped by the head of the National Bank," said the man on the other side of the counter. Off we went to the National Bank. Forty other people were standing outside the sanctum of this all-powerful official. My escort walked to the head of the queue and we found ourselves inside the room. "But I cannot stamp this letter until it bears a stamp for 10 *kurus*," said the head of the National Bank. The escort produced

one and remarked without a flicker, "Stalemate, I think, Sir?"

I nearly fell on his neck and we forgot ourselves enough to laugh in the presence of the All-powerful. So far, our negotiations had taken over an hour and we still had to return to the original bank for the cash.

Then came the journey to the other end of the city for the visa. The escort consented to wait in a neighbouring café whilst I went inside the Consulate. After examining the passport with great care and noting the other visas, the Consul laughed and said that it was quite impossible for him to grant a visa on a passport bearing the profession of musician.

"If *only* you had obtained the visa three weeks ago, before the new legislation forbidding an musicians to enter Rumania had come into action."

He was so disarming that one could not feel angry.

"Well, what am I to do, Monsieur le Consul? I am not going there to play in an orchestra or take any work from any one."

In the end he agreed that if the British Consul identified me with a letter of recommendation all would be well. The escort called a taxi and we careered down the narrow back streets to the British Consulate where the letter was duly presented to me with a warning not to get into any trouble again.

At the sight of this precious document the

Rumanian Consul became even more effusive and with much merriment signed the visa and wished me every success in my work.

"*Il y a toujours des espions et des musiciens!*" he said, and patted me on the back as I walked to the front door.

By this time it was midday and I was hungry and completely exhausted. The escort suggested that he should now leave me and return with the passport to the Commissar.

"Surely you will eat with me? After being so kind in taking me all over the town, it is the least I can offer you."

With some reluctance he accepted the invitation, explaining that it was not at all customary for suspects to entertain their guards.

"But if M'sieur does not mind sitting down with me, naturally I accept the honour with great pleasure." We ate an enormous meal in the famous restaurant of Abdullah el Lokantasi. First a dish of *yalanci dolma*—vine leaves wrapped round spiced rice and sultanas and flavoured with cinnamon, next followed *kuzu kagit kebalu*—a dish of lamb and six sorts of vegetables; the meat is wrapped up with the vegetables in greased paper and baked in oil. Sour cream and thin wafers of gingerbread are eaten with this dish which is almost worth going all the way to Turkey. We finished with bowls of *yogurt* (fermented sheep's milk) and a plate of sweets made from almonds, pistachios and honey.

Sometimes when they serve me in London with

the insipid stuff that passes for English cooking I remember that in Istanboul is one of the finest restaurants in Europe, where a man may eat his fill for a few shillings. The worst of it is that Turkey is such a long way off—and when you do at last arrive the Authorities make it almost impossible to be left alone.

On the way back to the ship I called in at the Agents' office to inquire if they had any mail for me and found a note written on a scrap of blue paper tucked inside a box of Loquum. It was a brief and rather mysterious note saying, "Please come to flat at earliest convenience, am in great difficulty."

As the Agent assured me that I was quite at liberty to stay ashore until the harbour gates closed at midnight I decided to take a taxi and go up to see what had become of the Passenger for Istanboul. The escort said that this would be quite in order if I would first surrender the passport to the Commissar. Unfortunately the Commissar was asleep on the table when we arrived at his office, but he seemed quite pleased to see me and asked if everything had been to my satisfaction.

"Why, of course, the escort was most obliging and polite."

"He is paid to be, m'sieur," answered the Commissar.

I arrived at the flat feeling full of curiosity and with a presentiment that something unforeseen—if not unpleasant—had happened. A maid answered the door and said that Madame would be down in a moment. Perhaps a minute passed before my friend

appeared, it could not have been longer, but the seconds dragged by like hours. She came silently into the room and motioned me into a chair, saying:

"Sit down, Mr. Thornton, and tell me what you know about the Oxford Groups."

I gave her my own impression of the movement, with its nebulous dogma and theology. She stared at the wallpaper and listened intently.

"But surely you have not called me up here to tell you that? What has happened to make you look so ill and worried?"

"No, I only wanted to know what this movement was, before telling you that Julius has been converted to their ideas. He refuses to have any more to do with me and says the Group has completely changed his outlook. I do not really understand half the things he talks about."

So the Group had stolen her young man!

"What will you do, then," I asked.

"I leave Istanboul in an hour's time, Julius is now quite indifferent to me, there is no point in staying here. It is good of you to have come so soon—will you do me one last service?"

"Of course."

"The train; I am not brave enough to go away from here alone—would you come to the station and see me off?"

We did not talk any more of the man nor make further reference to the blow that had fallen on her. She just laughed and joked about the things that had happened during those short days on the ship. Only when the train had puffed its way laboriously from

the platform did I notice a handkerchief that paused in its waving to dab at tear-filled eyes, and suddenly realised that neither of us had even thought of exchanging our addresses. Istanbul is indeed a place of mystery.

The situation was made the more ludicrous by the fact that she had travelled for six weeks in a cargo boat to see a man who shunned her company in his phase of religious obsession.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

NEXT morning the drizzle stopped and the sun came out, drying up the puddles and making the Mosques stand out against the pale-blue sky. During breakfast the Captain had a sudden visit from the Chief Engineer who announced that two of the principal donkey-engines operating the winches had been fouled by a tipsy dock-labourer. This would take a whole day to mend as the gear-boxes were ruined and required a new set of cogwheels. The Captain turned his watery eyes towards the ceiling as though looking into the heavens and cursed the Fate that brought his ship into Turkish waters, "Gott! how I hate these Turkish lice."

With three days to spare it gave me ample opportunity of seeing some of the show-places that every visitor to Istanboul is required to see. Should he return home without having bought postcards of the Blue Mosque, the Sultan's Palace and Agia Sophia there is bound to be a string of questions—"But surely you saw the Harem? You must have been to the Blue Mosque? Now, did you see the lovely carpets in Saint Sophia?"

The only things that stick out in my memory after an exhausting tour of these three very well-known places are the collection of exquisite Court dresses worn by the Ottoman Emperors since 1063—the absence of any carpets or furniture in the now-

guttered Agia Sophia—and the complete unconcern of a group of worshippers in the Blue Mosque, who were listening to an exposition on the 86th Sura of the Koran.

Guides speaking every European language so badly that Chinese would have seemed quite as well, insist on showing you round the Public Buildings. In Agia Sophia a man started to explain in a great flood of excruciating Polish how he had been left behind in Istanboul after the White Russians retreated from the Ukraine. I gave him a few *kurus* to stop the noise. Another guide asked me if I would like a packet of "Cigarettes." Curious to know what advantage he could possibly gain from peddling cigarettes, I asked to see a packet. One sniff at the contents was enough to tell me that they were merely a convenient way of disguising opium.

I took refuge from the guides and pimps by going into the big grey mosque that stands by the Galata Bridge. This is one of the few buildings that has been kept exclusively as a place of prayer. It was just turning six when I washed my feet and entered the dimly-lit interior. The mosque from inside seemed even more enormous than from the street, this was partly due to the height of the central dome and the absence of any supporting pillars except in the side aisle. Straw-matting and carpets covered the entire floor-space. I took my place with the other worshippers and listened to the voice of a blind cantor reciting the Koranic law. He was quite young—perhaps about thirty-five years old, but his face showed the suffering that had marred his life.

The eyes had been completely removed and the upper lids cut away.

A man came and knelt next to me; I made room for him on the frayed carpet where we were sitting. When he had finished his prayers I noticed that it was the head of the National Bank, he recognised me and smiled. Sometimes the cantor would stop singing and rock himself to and fro with his head swaying like a pendulum. If he had temporarily forgotten a line one of the congregation sitting near would prompt from their copies of the Koran. Here, in this dingy quietness, I felt for the first time that I had found a trace of the real Istanbul. To me the Neon-ray advertisements, the jazz, the other signs of progress that greeted the visitor from every side, meant very little; in the mosque there was still a trace of the majestic detachment that had once been the secret of Turkish domination.

As I was putting on my socks in the portico, the Bank man came out and said that he was delighted to see me in the mosque and had no idea his English customer was a Moslem. There then ensued a long explanation of my activities in studying Islamic music at Fez and I added that although no Moslem I had great sympathy for the Faith.

We chatted about the changing face of the country and I invited him to cross the road and drink coffee in the nearby Café. Two years before the war he had been to England with his father. They had hoped to find a school for his education, but the rudeness of the English and their extraordinary climate rather disheartened them, so he went to

Paris and was caught up in the interminable complications of the war. By a process of bribery his father managed to get the boy—then fifteen years old—smuggled into Holland, where he received his training as a banker. During the whole of this time he never forsook the Moslem tenets instilled during his childhood in Istanbul.

“Twelve years ago I returned to my eldest brother’s house. Both my parents had died during the war and have settled down in this new Turkey which has become far stranger to me than any European city.”

I asked him about the changes that Mustapha Kemal had effected in the real status of Islam as the creed of the country. His reply came slowly but with a bitter conviction.

“The desecration of our Mosques as museums and show-places for tourists has been regarded with the same horror that you Christians would feel if you saw a Moslem spit the Sacrament in the face of a priest.”

I told him what the old man in Ismir had said about the new regime, but he flatly denied that the passing of the Greeks was any loss to Turkey. They were “as treacherous as snakes and cruel as cats.” At length our conversation became so impassioned that before he would let me go back to the ship for the night I had promised that I would call in at the Bank and collect a book called *The Daughter of Smyrna*. This book, he said, would give me the *truth* about what happened when the Allied Forces sent a Greek army to occupy the town.

Accordingly we met the next morning for lunch. The book was presented with considerable ceremony and I promised to read it and make known its contents. It was a slim, paper-bound novelette printed in Lahore by a Moslem propagandist movement called the Dar-ul-Kutub Islamia.

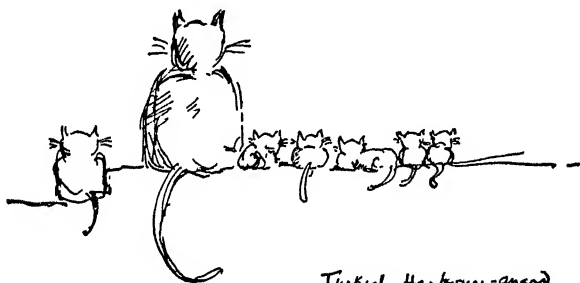
We went in a rowing-boat to the banker's house which was up the Golden Horn and looked out over the water. If the War had not broken out in 1914, my parents might still have been living there, too, for it was their intention to settle down in that beautiful part of Istanboul. To-day, after more than twenty years, the general appearance of the Horn has greatly changed, though the atmosphere is very much the same, even though they have done away with the original bridge of boats infested with specimens of all the diseased and maimed beggars that inhabited the city. The most noticeable thing is the grimy appearance of the buildings. It was the grime that first made me think that Istanboul had a damp gloom in common with Manchester.

Although the food was excellent I did not enjoy the meal at the banker's. He had a mode of speech somewhat like a gramophone that never stopped and only played two records. His stories once told were entertaining; after the eighth rehearsal they became agonising. I invented an excuse to leave early and walked back to the ship for the last time.

The sun had shone during the morning in fitful starts, and by the afternoon all the rain-clouds had blown away to the east. It became pleasantly warm

as I wandered along the waterside towards the Galata Bridge.

Mr. Beverley Nichols, in his recent book, has commented somewhat hysterically on the cruelty that he witnessed in the very street where I was walking. Nobody would deny that the Turks are cruel to the lower animals, but I have never seen them maltreat their little children with half the satisfaction and savagery so frequently reported in our English Police Courts.



*Turkish Harbour-guard
& Watch Committee!*

There are scores of cats roaming the streets of Istanbul, most of them are thieves. The same could be said of Liverpool where I was the unwilling witness of a scene quite as distressing as the cat-baiting reported by Mr. Nichols. For in this instance an infuriated dock-labourer took his jack-knife and stabbed the cat through its stomach. Not a pretty story, but home-grown ones are never pleasant.

I stopped and peered in at an archway leading into what at first appeared to be a great shop, and noticing that people walked in and out without any concern I slipped inside to find that it was the

entrance not of a shop, but of a roofed-in market. The only sunlight came from small ventilation shafts like chimneys built high in the roof some twenty-five feet above. Small oil-lamps hung from each stall. The floor underfoot was beautifully tiled in red. From the general appearance of the place I imagine that it was once a vast Turkish bath and is now converted into a cloth and furniture market. The alley-ways between the stalls were arranged with great care to give the maximum of stall and the minimum of walking-space.

For a few minutes after coming out of the bright streets I could see nothing except the twinkle of the lamps but when my eyes adjusted themselves to the perpetual twilight all sorts of fascinating shapes came into view. From the top of one stall dangled scores of quilted baby coverlets. Next door a man was piecing together a cradle of carved pearwood—as yellow as butter. In a far corner I noticed a small group of men haggling over a nest of squat, circular tables.

I bought a set of beautifully-carved wooden spoons from a slant-eyed old man who spoke Russian. He had travelled thousands of miles to Istanboul with his family of ten children. They used once to live by the *Qara Qum*—the Black Sands of Turkestan—but when news of the Russian Revolution had reached their village the entire population migrated rather than live under Soviet domination. At that time, frontiers were uncertain things and they soon found themselves living on Turkish ground. To-day the family was somewhat scattered but the old man

was apparently quite contented to carve spoons and end his days by the side of the Golden Horn.

One of his sons was working in films at Hollywood. I looked at my watch, for we were due to sail at five, and discovered that it had stopped. In fact, it never went again because somebody had knocked into me in the streets, and the face was smashed to fragments. Without my watch I had not the vaguest idea of the time, and had forgotten how to ask for such information in Turkish. So I spent almost a whole hour beating down the price of a fur cap and a pair of embroidered trousers made of green velvet. The stallholder was just wrapping up my purchases in a length of cotton—for he had no clean paper at hand—when I distinctly heard the hooting of a ship's siren. Not merely any ship's siren, but the siren I knew only too well to mistake. There was not a moment to spare. Seizing the parcel, I scurried out of the market into the streets. How strange it is that when you want to hurry, no matter whether it is in Istanbul, Eastbourne or Vancouver, the streets appear to be packed with people.

I have already written that nobody hurries in Turkey. The spectacle of a young man rushing about dodging the traffic is quite enough to excite attention, but on this particular afternoon the young man was the more conspicuous on account of the untidy parcel he clutched to his chest like a man with a Rugby football. I managed to get to the harbour without mishap, but was horrified to see that the clock over the entrance said quarter-past five.

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

The captain received my apologies with a mild, watery stare.

"It does not matter. We thought that perhaps you had been poisoned by the Turkish food, or put in prison for looking at the unveiled women."

He turned away to shout an order to the Chief Engineer, and we were off again.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

STEAMING up the Bosphorus to the Black Sea is an exciting trip. Sometimes you pass so close to the land that it looks quite certain the ship will run ashore. Lovely villas and castles line the northern bank, and fishing villages are dotted about on the less beautiful ground on the southern side. Captain Van Oss said that these eighteen miles separating the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmora are the worst waters east of Gibraltar. The current alone would strike terror into most hearts as it boils and churns with evil slithering noises against the ship's body. I made a parcel of rubbish collected from my cabin and flung it out as we passed by a whirlpool. The dark waters opened their mouth and slobbered down the packet with a human smack of the lips. Soon we turned the corner at Rumeli and headed north into the Black Sea. To-morrow will bring a new country, a new language, and a new people.

The people of Burgas were celebrating St. George's Day on the morning we arrived. This meant that no work whatever could be done. There was to be a big parade in the centre of the town, so the Lady from Java, Passenger 3, and I went in a party to see what was going on.

Burgas looks beautiful from the sea. Green low-lying hills roll away on every side and form a fitting background for the red-and-yellow buildings

that look out over the harbour. There is an earnest atmosphere about the three main streets that run inland. For these streets are clean and wide, reflecting the solid orderliness of the Bulgarian mind.

I noticed immediately the enormous difference in the attitude of the Bulgars to a foreigner. They are a downtrodden, impoverished race. Beguiled into fighting against the Allies in the last war, they lost a great wedge of their Macedonian population. Prior to that they had the rich plains of Dobrugea taken by the Rumanians as part of the spoil after the wars of independence from Turkish domination. All that happened about twenty-five years before the end of the last century, but the older generations of Bulgars still talk about Dobrugea as though it had only just been taken over by Rumania.

Some people have likened the Bulgars to the Prussians.

Few Prussians have any imagination or manners, but every Bulgar I met had both these precious gifts and many more charming characteristics often lacking in their neighbours the Serbians. If you speak to a policeman in Sophia, and he cannot understand, he salutes and smiles his apologies. Then he stops a number of likely passers-by until somebody turns up who can interpret your request. Try to make a gendarme in Belgrad understand you, and he will most likely stare with vacant hostility. On one occasion I was nearly arrested for asking the way to the Press Bureau because I happened to be carrying a bulky parcel that the poor Serb was convinced *must* be a bomb.

I walked through the town of Burgas feeling that here was a hospitable country. The streets were gay with banners and flags, and at a distance was the sound of children singing. In the square were hundreds of people standing quietly on the broad pavements and watching contingents of scholars march up and take their positions. At noon the place was crammed with people. A great bell in the Cathedral tolled excitedly as the West doors opened and a procession of Church dignitaries came slowly down the steps and walked to an open-air altar that stood in the centre of the vast crowd.

Even the smallest child stopped fidgeting and stood with bowed head as the Bishop sang a long benediction and blessed the onlookers in the name of the Holy Trinity and Saint George. For a few moments there was a dead silence, then the bells tolled more joyfully than before and the procession went back to the church as the entire congregation of soldiers, children, war veterans, Social Clubs and Women's Institutes sang a special hymn in honour of their Patron Saint. Even the gendarmes took off their pale-blue caps and sang with the rest. Passenger 3 commented afterwards that, although it was very "interestink, it iss alzo a pity that they are not Protestants." I left her in charge of the Lady from Java and went to light a candle in the Cathedral.

I knew that candle would bring me luck—and it did. Whilst eating a delicious alfresco meal of roast lamb stuffed with spiced walnuts and a great dish of sour sheep's milk and strawberries, a man

came into the restaurant garden and handed round printed notices of a wrestling contest and other attractions that were to be seen on a Fair Ground at the other end of the town. At the next table sat a great party of children with two jolly-looking men whom I concluded must be their schoolmasters. They knew that I was a foreigner, but of what breed none could determine. There would be covert glances in my direction, followed by fresh bursts of argument and laughter. In my pocket was an Armenian newspaper. With what I hoped was a natural nonchalance I pulled the paper out and pretended to read it. Was I an Armenian? "Surely not," said one of the fat men. "He does not look intelligent enough for an Armenian!"

My hat gave the show away: it was of soft, pale-grey felt. Gazing at it, they whispered to each other, "*Viži, viži Angliskata shapka.*"—"Look, it's an English hat!"

Having determined his race, they decided to drink to the health of the foreigner in the felt hat. One of the masters rapped on the table. All the children rose and turning in my direction, bowed and toasted me. I followed with a garbled speech in French liberally seasoned with Bulgarian and Russian idiom. Then we all shook hands and went off to see the wrestling.

The two masters were as delighted as the children to air their knowledge of English, and plied me with a rapid fire of questions about the pronunciation of words they had met whilst trying to read parts of *Alice in Wonderland*. For the most part we had

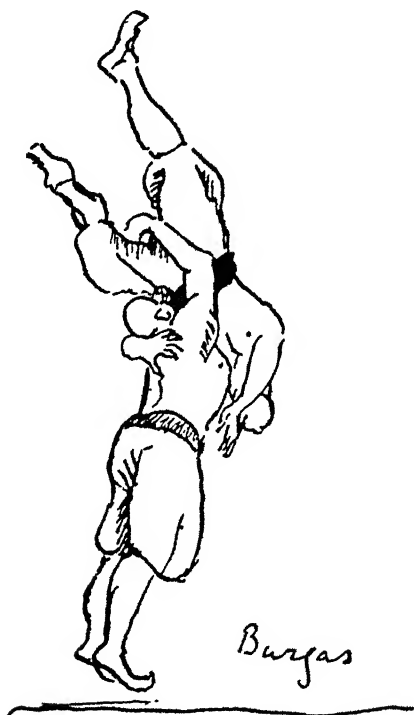


TURKISH GIRL FROM DOBRUGEA.



DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

no difficulty in understanding each other, as there was always some common language that supplied the missing words. If French failed, we tried German, and if the word in German meant nothing



AT BURGAS.

to anybody, then I dived into my phrase-book and trotted out a Bulgar or Turkish equivalent. By the time we arrived at the Fair Ground I had a boy and a girl on each arm, and we all decided to dance when the wrestling was over!

At the end of the long main street that leads

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

out of the town we turned off to the left and arrived at a patch of waste ground thronged with people. The wrestling had already started, and the combatants flung each other about with an abandon that excited the crowd to a pitch of wild enthusiasm. At first sight all one saw was a jumble of brown arms and naked backs of the wrestlers mixed up with their voluminous brown trousers.

Each round lasted until somebody was thrown and spread-eagled. One of the scholars pointed out his family gardener—a Turk, who was reputed to



be the strongest man in Burgas. There were very few rules, and the only fouls seemed to be given for stamping on an opponent's stomach after he had fallen, or biting his wrists in order to break a clinch. After the wrestling, which lasted about an hour, a military band took up a central position and started playing a Pajdushka. Seized by excited hands, I found myself whirled into the general melée.

The steps looked impossibly difficult until I realised that I was completely missing the beat, which was in a fast 5/16 rhythm.

Pajdushka has about forty variations of step, and

is one of the best-known Bulgarian Dances. We kept at it for twenty minutes without a break, and then the band switched into the Kustendilsko Khoros. This is a 9/8 rhythm, easier than Pajdushka, but more exhausting.

Soldiers danced next to merchants' daughters and peasants took hands with the young men from the naval college. There was no consciousness of class or self in that crowd of simple people. I felt again the same great wave of Unity that had so impressed me in the Albanian village. It is well-nigh impossible for a man to put into words a feeling so intangible yet unforgettable if once experienced. Let the sceptic go and see for himself—if he dares.

Late in the afternoon we went off for a meal in the school garden. A wonderful spread of cold meats, savoury pies, iced cakes of almonds and honey, and mixture of sour milk and fruit. Once refreshed, we cleared away the tables and chairs and danced down the good fare. The fatter of the two schoolmasters provided the accompaniment on a raucous harmonica.

Round the garden, in and out of the summer-house, we went—a chain of prancing, jiggling energy. Time had ceased to matter, responsibilities had faded away. The dance had absorbed us into itself, and had given back a feeling of freedom and happiness that nothing else can produce in so fine a measure.

Back in my stuffy cabin I sat on the bunk and stared out over the quiet waters of the harbour wondering if it had all been a happy dream. But



JANKA.

no, it was a glimpse of a reality that is hidden away in the fastness of Bulgaria's inaccessibility.

The whole of the next day, from dawn to evening, the dock workers unloaded our remaining cargo of steel girders and filled the empty holds with 4,000 bales of Macedonian tobacco. Armed men stood on guard by the siding where the trucks drove up laden with the fragrant cargo. That evening we sailed out of Burgas high up in water, for the ship was almost empty. I was thankful for a calm sea and a southerly wind, for nothing is more unnerving than facing a storm with empty holds. Each time the stern rides up out of the sea the engine races in a way that makes the vessel's plates and fittings shudder like a jelly. We played whist for the last time—not because of the weather, but because Passenger 3 had taken a great liking to the game.

How strange is the cordiality that marks one's parting from an irritating fellow-passenger. It is like saying good-bye to the staff on leaving school. I wrung Passenger 3 by the hand and said I hoped we should meet again. The Lady from Java I knew I should miss, for we had a very genuine appreciation of each other. Captain Van Oss saluted and wished me a prosperous and safe journey through Bulgaria. "You must not drink their water and eat any raw salads, for they are always watering their gardens with muck."

With his warning in my ears, I walked off with the military guard to the Customs office, where the bags had been taken. My debt of gratitude to the Dutch pro-Consulate at Varna will never be paid.

Their representative (who was also the ship's Agent) could not do enough to help me. But for his timely advice I might be still sitting in Varna gaol. Nobody can leave Bulgaria without giving twenty-four hours' notice of this event; moreover he must state exactly by which frontier he intends to cross and the time that the train will arrive at the frontier station. I did not realise this; nor did I know that until the divisional superintendent at Shumen—or whatever he is called—had given his permission I should not have been able to so much as leave Varna.

All the complications were straightened out by the Agent, who sent telegrams right and left to announce my arrival in Bulgaria to the superintendent and my intended exit to the authorities at Rushchouk on the Danubian Frontier. It drizzled all day and was bitterly cold. The Black Sea looked sullen and wicked as it pounded its waves on the deserted beaches of Varna. In the summer Varna becomes a crowded pleasure resort frequented by visitors from all over Central and Eastern Europe; but in the spring it is just a busy port with the harbour full of shipping and crowds of dock labourers walking about the quays.

I stayed for one night at the Hotel London, a large and impressive building with scores of rooms but only one bath that worked. For nearly two weeks I had not had a proper hot bath. This was not so much due to water shortage as to the fact that every drop of boiling water had to be carried in buckets from the cook's galley to our bathroom

under the bridge. Consequently we washed in four inches of tepid sea-water.

Taking a bath at the Hotel London was quite an ornate ritual. Three-quarters of an hour before the appointed time a fire of small logs was lit at the bottom of an arrangement that resembled a giant samovar. The water trickles into the bath at first slowly and then with a great deal of spitting and hissing, for it soon boils on its way through the samovar. The bath is filled as full as possible before they turn off the water, which is, of course, far too hot to use until it has cooled down. The cold water is cut off from somewhere outside the bathroom whilst the cooling takes place, "For fear of an explosion," explained the valet de chambre.

I was enjoying the warm comfort of the bath some minutes later when, without any warning, a stream of icy water came pouring out of the samovar. Evidently the fear of explosion had passed. With some difficulty I found a tap and stopped the flow. Nothing is more precious to a traveller than his first proper bath after a long period without such a luxury. It is even more lovely than sleeping for the first time in a clean bed with a comfortable pillow.

There were piles of magazines in the bathroom, mostly trade journals from Japan and Czechoslovakia. I came across a remarkable notice in a paper called the *Japanese Exporter*, which advertised a special albuminous enzyme extracted from ficus:

"If you use Sofna in cooking tough meat, you can

make the meat of highest grade which facilitates digestion and absorption."

"It is very suitable for cooking roast pork, beef, chicken, beef stew, meat ball and others."

I wonder who "and others" can be? Are the modern Japanese turning their surplus population into tasty ragouts? On the back page of this entertaining periodical was a coloured display of toys—dolls of every sort and shape, animals and soldiers in weird uniforms—doubtless representing the Japanese conception of European military attire. Beneath this advertisement it reassured the prospective purchaser that:

"In all cases care is being payed so that they (the toys) will be absolutely safe and harmless to children."

"A voluminous catalogue covering their manufacture is standing ready to be sent to inquirers on application."

I am an "inquirer on application," but I am still waiting for the standing catalogue. Japan has evidently got a footing in Bulgaria, though personally I do not think that she can compete with Czecho-slovakia in producing the sort of goods that the peasant really wants. There is a big shop in Sophia that sells the usual range of Japanese trumpery—dolls, umbrellas, hideous printed cotton and tea-sets—but I noticed with some satisfaction that there were very few customers.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE journey to Bucharest was a long one, but full of interest at every stage. I had the good fortune to find myself sitting in a compartment with the German Consul and his wife, an Irishwoman from Cork. They were going to Bucharest for a short holiday, and seemed as pleased to talk to me as I was happy to find them; for there is strength in numbers—and I had heard dark stories of the Rumanian frontier officials. At Kaspichan we changed trains and got into a very slow but comfortable local train that was to take us to Rushchouk. The Bulgarian trains have every reason to be good. Most of the carriages are of pre-war German manufacture. King Boris has a passion for driving railway engines; and when Edward VIII. visited the Balkans this last summer, our papers showed pictures of the two sovereigns chatting by the side of the engine that was to take the English king across Bulgaria. Knowing the universal fear of assassination that colours the life of that country, one concluded King Boris was making certain that if England's ruler were harmed by some mischance, the catastrophe would at least be shared by the man who was not only driving the engine but also in charge of Bulgaria's throne. During the past months our newspapers have included frequent pictures and news puffs of the Balkans. Why? What does it all mean? Four—even three—years ago

the public hardly ever heard of King Boris, or Mustapha Kemal. As for Carol of Rumania, why, the press took a fiendish delight in dragging his name in the domestic mud. I remember reading a series of articles about Madame Lupescu which appeared each week in a certain Sunday paper and attracted a great deal of comment.

Now we are polite and deferential to the Balkan kings. We invite them to our Jubilee and gave them prominent places in the recent King's Funeral Procession.

But this sudden interest in Bulgaria is worthy of consideration. Perhaps the British Government is at last waking to the fact that Bulgaria again holds the key to the peace of half Europe. At every turn one sees frantic efforts on the part of German propagandists to curry favour with this insignificant state. They send magnificent orchestras to Sophia. The Berlin Philharmonic stayed in my hotel last June. They open excellent schools, and have done a thousand little things to please the Bulgar. What, for instance, is the real explanation of why a German air line operates from Sophia at the expense of the recently cancelled French concern. No three people in Sophia will tell you quite the same story, but they are unanimous in saying that the Germans manipulated the *impasse* that resulted in the withdrawal of French interest. The more you see the less you can tell which way the wind blows. One thing is quite certain: the wind blowing across Bulgaria comes charged with every sort of Nazi intrigue.

If Germany succeeds in annexing the military training and economic life of Bulgaria in the same way that Mussolini now controls the commercial and political life of Albania, then the day will not be far off when the Mittel-Europa dream becomes a horrible reality. Russia will increase her already carefully organised spy system that stretches like an invisible net from Bessarabia to the Ægean Sea. Communism and National Socialism must one day come to blows. What easier field for the conflict than the Balkan kingdoms that offer unknown possibilities of intensive economic development. We shall see some curious developments before very long.

My first glimpse of the Danube was a vast expanse of dirty-brown water glistening in the sun as it raced westward towards the sea. By no stretch of imagination could it be called the Blue Danube. The Thames at Wapping Stairs is no more blue than the Danube either at Vienna or Budapest. The song may possibly have been written by somebody with acute strabismic colour blindness. All luggage was searched at Rushchouk, and careful inquiries were made about the coinage we intended to take out of Bulgaria. I remembered the warning about getting the departure visas and went off with my two friends to dig out the official who was supposed to be on duty, but he had taken off his boots and was snoring loudly. Rather naturally, when awakened by our united tramping on the bare boards, he was rather sour, and did his best to remove the diplomatic return-visa from the Consul's passport, and

only after a heated argument consented to release the precious yellow paper.

Rushchouk is rather a dishevelled place, but has a wonderful Post Office, where they can guarantee to muddle the words of any telegram so perfectly that even the sender cannot decipher the result. I sent a wire to a friend in Bucharest in order to announce the exact hour of my arrival—six French words written in block capitals. But when it arrived the day after I did, the result was completely unintelligible.

We went to have coffee at a Hotel Teteven. Although it was two-thirty in the afternoon, the staff had not yet recovered from their exertions of the previous night. A bleary-eyed woman dragged herself out on to the pavement with great reluctance and served us with undrinkable coffee and dirty rolls. I should not like to stay in the Hotel Teteven; it is the sort of place where Edgar Allen Poe might stage one of his fantastic murders.

"This is an occasion when time does not fly," sighed the German Consul and lit a cigar.

In the middle of the river, half-way between Rumania and Bulgaria, the ferry gives three long hoots, signalling that it is about to cross the frontier. Such is the power of the current, that the ferry has to make an oblique course to get across to Giurgiu. Great grappling irons are dropped across the deck as soon as she draws alongside the landing-stage, and greasy little men speaking a language like dog-Latin hop aboard and seize the baggage. We have arrived in Rumania.

The Customs man was curious to know what was inside my cameras. Apart from that he scarcely looked at anything. But the cameras needed a great deal of explaining, and I was made to demonstrate their workings before he was convinced that they were not bombs dressed in new attire. Almost before we had taken our seats in the train two secret agents—a man and a woman—came in and started to cross-examine us as to our movements in the next few days, our reasons for visiting Rumania, and where we intended to stay in the capital. This went on for quite half an hour after the train started. I became more and more amazed at their pointed rudeness to the German Consul and his wife.

Then a strange thing happened. I got up and turned on the agents with terrific venom. We knew they were no passengers; their ridiculous behaviour labelled them as spies—and pretty poor spies at that. If they were not careful the Consul would send an official protest to their Government. I should be seeing the Minister in charge of the Press Bureau on arrival at București¹, and intended to report the whole affair.

Having said my little piece, I sat down and waited to be arrested. Instead of arresting me, they both got up and with fawning apologies left the compartment. They went off the train at the next station—no doubt to return for further victims on the night train.

I used to think that Paris was the home of

¹ The correct spelling of the Capital is BUCUREȘTI. It looks prettier and is more accurate than the English version.

espionage and secret police, but a few hours in Rumania are quite enough to convince me that here is the real home of bribery and intimidation. Perhaps Rome runs Bucureşti fairly close on points when it comes to secret police. The great difference is that the Rumanian brand can always be dealt with either by a bribe or threats to report them to Minister X or Director Y. The streets of the capital are packed with loitering men wearing black homburgs and pretending to read the paper. A child could spot them at a hundred yards. They are King Carol's myrmidons. Without this army of protectors he cannot venture from the door of his palace that faces the university. Fear and corruption are the main under-currents of the gaiety and irresponsible behaviour of Bucureşti.

We all know the story of the young Rumanian who, boasting to his French friends, said that Bucureşti was a little Paris, and how his audience quickly retorted, "Perhaps—but thank God Paris is not a large Bucureşti!" Personally I find no remote resemblance between any two parts of Paris and Bucureşti.

Had I known that on the next morning King Carol and his son Michael were to review detachments from every section of the army, navy and air force, I might have been prepared for that scene in the train. The most extraordinary precautions were being taken on this occasion to check the movements of aliens entering the capital. A friend had promised me a ticket to attend this great

military review, and I had altered all my plans in order to arrive in time. He had forgotten to mention that the king would be present.

From five o'clock in the morning lorryloads of singing soldiers poured past the hotel. They were going to take up sentry positions all round the parade ground. My ticket admitted me to a stand¹ allotted to the Tribune of Deputies. There was accommodation for about four hundred people in each stand, but tickets had been issued for nearly a thousand. I was searched before being allowed to enter the ground and re-searched before sitting down.

The parade started (about an hour late) with a tedious ceremony during which King Carol and son were blessed by the head of the Rumanian Church. Then, amid clouds of sand and dirt that blew up like pillars and stretched to the sky, a magnificent if gaudy procession rode past, headed by the King sitting on a pure white charger. Everybody stood up and cheered. The stand creaked and groaned its protests. At any moment I expected the whole thing to give way. Only a few weeks later there was a ghastly tragedy at a similar parade when some hundreds of people were injured and many crushed to death when a line of stands collapsed.

King Carol bowed and smiled to the fervid shouts of his subjects and sometimes waved his field-marshal's baton. Behind him were the military attachés and high officials in the forces. Each time

¹ The stands were arranged in a long line—50 on each side of the royal dais—with their entrances at the back.

he waved the baton, his plumed hat fell a little farther to the right. By the time this cavalcade had taken up its position to watch the march past, I noticed the hat at a very queer angle.

For three hours that stream of men and boys flowed past their King. Their uniforms were gorgeously hideous for the most part. Every colour under the sun had been employed, and even the police corps wore chocolate brown picked out in lemon yellow, crowned with pudding basins of maroon felt decorated at the right with a clump of cockerels' feathers. There was one detachment of infantry wearing azure blue trousers lined with vermilion, and jackets of peacock-green frogged with claret-coloured silk and epaulettes of silver braid. What excellent targets the Rumanian Army will make. They told me that designing military uniforms and new postage stamps are King Carol's chief amusements.

The young Crown Prince Michael marched past with the military college where he is training. I had never seen this young man except in newspapers at home. I saw the prince several times during my visit to Rumania, and the enthusiasm at his reception was interesting and reassuring.

The Military Parade was not an ordinary show like Trooping the Colour or the Horseguards' Parade; it marked the seventieth anniversary of the coming of the Royal Dynasty to Rumania—then an insignificant ex-Turkish vassal state.

I watched the parade till one-thirty and then decided that I had seen enough soldiers for one day.

After a fight to get out of the stand, I was seized by two Men in Homburgs and told that I could not leave the Parade Ground until the ceremony was over. Then I discovered that the King stood only a few yards away, and their chief fear was that he might be assassinated by a person like myself who would sneak up behind the dais and shoot him in the back. The Rumanians, needless to say, do not play cricket, Colonel Blimp.

No doubt I must have looked peculiarly stupid and un-spylike that Sunday morning, for the Men in Homburgs readily consented to release me if I made a detour of half a mile in another direction in order to avoid walking behind the Royal back. A hundred lei pressed into their damp palms settled the bargain, and they called two pleasant-looking soldiers to march on either side of me. The soldiers were content with twenty lei each to take a short cut that brought us out on the tram lines at the back of the barracks. We shook hands, and they waved their rifles as the tram moved off.

Before I left these soldiers they had told me that there would be plenty of dancing that evening at Baneâsa. When a Rumanian says a thing is going to happen "in the evening," he means that it may take place at any hour from ten o'clock onwards. I did not know this and sallied forth far too early, with the result that I had to wait for a long time before the crowd had worked up their spirits enough to dance. Once they started, there

was no pause except to drink a quick glass of *Suika*¹ or *Vin alb*.

The spirit was far wilder and completely different from the orderly intricacy of the dancing at Burgas. This was partly due to the fact that it was late at night and we danced in the exciting light of a full moon. I am convinced that the hour of day has an enormous effect on a group of dancers, and there was a definite magic in that moonlight shining on the surface of the Baneâsa Lake. There was probably quite a lot of magic in the innumerable suikas that I drank, for the next morning I found it very difficult to remember anything except whirling round and round with a table in each hand. Perhaps it would be wisest not to enlarge any further on that memorable evening.

¹ Suika is plum brandy. Vin alb is a rough white wine.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE hotel porter gave me a message from Constantinescu saying that he would call to take me out to lunch at his house, and warning me not on any account to attempt any exchange of English currency until we met. The Rumanian foreign exchange is so arranged that the wretched visitor stands to lose about sixty-five per cent until he has found a Black Bourse.

In a few words it amounts to this: according to the laws governing the importation of foreign currency, the visitor must not only register his pounds or francs, but must also exchange them at the National Bank, where the rate is very unfavourable. Failure to comply with these requirements may result in a total confiscation of funds. Note that I have said *may* result, and not *will* result; if you have a trusted friend in the capital it is quite easy to find a Black Bourse—generally a private individual—where anything from 870 to 1016 lei will be paid for a pound note. A letter of credit is quite useless; if it is only negotiable through a bank they will give you about 460 to 670 lei as they feel inclined.

But why such extraordinary difference in price?

Even if a Rumanian subject were to succeed in smuggling out of his country a far larger sum of lei than is permitted by Governmental regulations,

he would find it almost impossible to dispose of it, except at a heavy loss, in the exchange. For outside Rumania the lei has a purely nominal value, fluctuating with the temporary demand of private individuals. Therefore the Rumanian traveller must somehow get hold of foreign currency if he wishes to leave home for business or pleasure. The Black Bourse sells him this currency at an admittedly high price, but he cannot get it in any other way, because the National Bank refuses to supply him.

The final result of this monkey puzzle is a constant demand by the private individual for foreign currency; and he is prepared to pay anything up to 120% above the par rate fixed by the banks. Rather naturally, the demand is for effective notes. Travellers' cheques or bank cheques are of practically no use on the Black Bourse. The English visitor will therefore do well to bear three important points in mind:

Never change money in a bank unless forced to by unforeseen circumstances.

Never patronise a Black Bourse without having had a personal recommendation from a trusted source.

Never accept any offers of exchange for £1 notes unless you have checked up on the current Black prices (which are printed in the papers—generally on a back page).

Failure to observe these three simple precautions

will inevitably lead to heavy loss on the Exchange and a possible—though improbable—chance of imprisonment.

In England you may be pressed by your bank to take a letter of credit for the journey. Apart from Jugoslavija and Greece, such an arrangement results in an average loss of thirty per cent of the total value, and a vast amount of exhausting argument before the foreign banks consent to cash your credited pounds into their own currency.

The Bulgars are far more strict over this money business. They have no Black Bourse, neither do they tolerate under any circumstances the exchange of money by private individuals. It is a penal offence even for a hotel to oblige a traveller with a little change for one of his foreign notes. The fine for engaging in any sort of exchange business outside the four walls of the Narodna Banka is very heavy. Should you attempt to cash your letter of credit, the bank knocks off a discount of about ten per cent from the current par value on the grounds that the letter of credit is of less value to them than effective bank notes.

There appears to be an extraordinary shortage of English currency in Bulgaria, and for this reason the bank snaps up every note it can find, even paying an extra ten per cent of its par value. On arrival at Sophia I cashed some money from my letter of credit at the rate of 409 leva to the pound. Two days later I walked into the bank with a pound note. Without any hesitation they paid me 440 leva in exchange for it.

Private individuals are prohibited from buying foreign currency in Bulgaria, and I was told that it is virtually impossible for Bulgarian travellers to leave home unless they happen to have friends abroad. The big businesses buy up the foreign notes as fast as they come into the country and use them for direct trade with their customers abroad.

Bulgarian currency can be bought in Salonica at very favourable rates, and sometimes in Belgrad you can bargain for Rumanian notes of a thousand lei. There is, of course, a fair risk of buying forged currency. Unless you have your wits about you they will hand over a bundle of faked notes dressed up at the top and bottom with bona fide specimens. I saw that happen to an American at a Belgrad exchange, and when I called her attention to the fact she gave me a frosty stare and walked out of the shop. Later in the same day I met a Frenchman who showed me a selection of six different sorts of European money printed by forgers at Zurich.

I can attempt no explanation of this ridiculous state of affairs, for apart from the fact that such a digression would be quite outside the scope of this book, it would also be extremely complicated and boring. Prompted by bitter reminiscences of fraud and cheating abroad and false advice from Travel Agencies at home, I have written down a few facts. The reader can draw his own conclusions—and perhaps take a warning at the expense of the author.

Constantinescu took me by the arm, and we marched off to find his friend who always gave the best prices for English pounds. We

did our business in the doorway of a small tobacconist's shop. I noticed the nervous tension that marked the bearing of the money changer. He twitched and fidgeted all the time we talked.

No money was produced, nor did we make any reference to it, except as "letters." A clock started to strike twelve, noon.

"How late will the train start for my friend Monsieur Thornton? He has six letters from England?" asked Constantinescu.

"Has he more than six? What about a little souvenir¹ from New York?" replied the Black Bourse agent.

"No, he has no souvenirs to-day—only letters."

"Very well, the train will start at eight twenty-five."

"That is far too early for us. Last week it started at nine o'clock." Constantinescu turned to me and said, "Too early for us, isn't it, Monsieur?"

"*Mais oui, il nous faut choisir un autre train!*" I answered.

"Very well, it can start at nine o'clock, but no later," agreed the nervous man. "But first buy me a paper. I have no change."

I bought a copy of *Dimineața* and slipped my £6 into the folded paper. As I handed him the precious newspaper, he bowed and offered me a small packet of five cigarettes. Four of them were 1000 lei notes, and the fifth contained a note for 500 lei. Our business was over in so few seconds that when we

¹ A "souvenir" is the term for 10 dollars. 8.55=855 lei to £1.
9 o'clock=900 lei to £1.

stepped out of the shop again I heard the last stroke of midday.

We drove off to see the exhibition at Luna Bucureștilor, which was outside the city at the end of a long avenue called *Chaussée Kisseleff*. Titulescu has a beautiful villa about half-way down this avenue. There are armed guards both in the garden and in the pill-box huts that stand outside the front gate. It would be very difficult to get at him unless you bribed the guards; and most likely they are so highly paid for their services that it would be a very expensive adventure. In any case, his chief enemies do not live in Rumania.

București was celebrating this Seventieth Anniversary of the Royal House with an Exhibition that was to make both the Rumanians and the foreigner conscious of the enormous development of the country since the War. Hungary was deprived of Transylvania, a huge semi-circular slice of territory north of the Carpathians, and Russia was forced to give back Bessarabia which she had pinched in 1878 as a reward for helping to drive out the Turks. The resentment in Hungary is boiling up to a pitch that threatens to explode at any moment. Similarly the Bulgarians hate the Rumanians with an even more deadly venom, as they regard the retention of Dobrugea as a monstrous injustice. I have seen patriotic anti-Rumanian propaganda at work in both countries.

After all these years since 1918, it seems rather pathetic that the idiotic re-shuffle of land which hoped to stop any further fighting may give rise at

any moment to another conflict. *The Times* of November 23rd, 1914, printed part of a telegram sent by the leading Rumanian statesman Jonescu to a Russian paper: "*Rumania should strive to promote a Serbo-Bulgarian agreement and do everything possible to come to terms with Bulgaria, thus enabling all the Balkan states to side with the nations of the Entente. A German victory would mean the burial of the hopes of the Balkan States and of the independence of the Neutral countries.*" Rumania had her own special reasons for the overthrow of Austria-Hungary. She had her eye on the Rumanians north of the Carpathians. Hungary is reaping to-day the bitter harvest that she sowed before 1914, when she treated the Slavs and Rumanians with the utmost cruelty and injustice. We had the exact parallel in Ireland before and during and now after the Trouble.

We have not beneficially progressed in any way since that situation of June 28th, 1914, when two Bosnian Serbs shot the heir to the throne of the Dual Monarchy. Hatred oozes out of the Magyar papers, while defiance and arrogance are the retaliation from the now wealthy states of Rumania and Jugoslaviya. The wrong sort of publicity is slowly but very surely coming across Europe into the minds of the English public.

The English have a mania about liberty; they are always prepared to champion the underdog. In this case the underdog is an old friend of theirs. He has wagged his Hungarian tail and entertained us with many pleasant and endearing tricks. Hungary has always welcomed her English friends and

visitors. Rumania knows all about this—so does Bulgaria; they are full of apprehension.

There are large numbers of Bulgars living north of the Danube. In Bucureşti alone there must be a colony of some thousands, for they have their own church, clubs and schools. When they talk about the present political situation it is always with a restraint and vagueness that are the direct result of fear. Fear gnaws into the very vitals of Rumania. Nobody speaks freely unless he has had too much to drink.

The Exhibition—"Luna Bucureştilor"—was a most exciting place. The authorities are to be congratulated for the wonderful show that they had built on a piece of waste land that ran along one side of the lake. Their idea was to give the visitor a potted impression of every activity of the country. Moreover, at a great expense they had constructed a big village at one end of the Exhibition, where a specimen house had been transported from each of the twelve divisions. Not only had they rooted up the very houses, but the occupants with their children, hens, pigs and cows. In a space of six acres the peasants' houses had been arranged as a village. There were six windmills from the Dniester provinces that gave a strange quality of unrealness to the whole scene. The visitor had only to consult his guide-book and he could see for himself what the people were like in any part of the kingdom. Each house was labelled according to the district, and the occupants went about their daily work with complete disregard of the prying eyes of the sightseers.

I spent nearly a week visiting the various houses and making friends with the gentle-faced people who lived in the village. Most of them hated the change.

"București is all very well for the town people who have never known the freedom of the fields, but for me it is like living in a grave," said one old man to me. The younger man and women rather enjoyed the excitement of travelling hundreds of miles to find their home transplanted to the capital. Unfortunately there had been some sort of hitch in getting two of the houses re-erected in time, and I saw the pitiful sight of a mother trying to get her two children asleep on a sack of straw thrown on the ground. One was only three months old.

On alternative evenings they arranged a two-hour entertainment of songs and dances. In the middle of the village was a dancing pitch of beaten earth sprinkled with sand, and a special gala performance was given at the end of the second week by school children and students from all the various provinces.

Thousands of people came to watch the dancing. Unlike the audience that goes to see displays of dancing in England, they sat down to watch with keenly critical eyes. They appreciate a good performance in the same way that one watches sheep-dog trials. In the Balkans everybody dances who is not lame or paralysed. It is a parallel accomplishment with driving a car or playing cards. These men and women have discovered the most satis-

factory physical and mental tonic that life can give them.

The young Prince Michael came to see this display. He looked quite interested in the performances. I had a stand for my cinematograph that overlooked his seat by the side of the pitch, and could watch his reactions without having to push my way through the innumerable guards and Men in Homburgs who protected him. They were taking no chances with me and the camera. Each time I released the catch to take a shot, the motor would tick like a time-bomb and a dozen heads swivelled round to watch what was happening. Then the prince noticed me and stared at the camera with undisguised interest. I raised my hat, nearly crashing down from the stand in the effort to treat His Highness to a deep bow whilst holding the apparatus in the other hand.

The only really hideous thing that I saw in Rumania took place that afternoon. Part of King Carol's policy has been to make the intelligensia better acquainted with the peasants. No sentiment could be more noble or fitting in a nation that has only recently found its way from the maze of almost total illiteracy. But the idea when put into practice results in the ludicrous sight of young men and women from the Universities pretending, as hard as their town-upbringing will allow, to be Children of the Soil. The Folky-vegetarians of England are certainly nothing to be proud of, but these pseudo-peasants, in their machine-embroidered shirts and skirts, blowing their dreadful trumpets and saxo-



"BLOWING THEIR DREADFUL TRUMPETS."



phones, are a thousand times more bogus than anything I have seen at home.

The pseudo-peasants marched round behind their band of exultant players, and each time they passed Prince Michael their right arms stiffened in the Fascist salute. At first I was half ready to take it as a joke—but no, their military bearing and martial step were all part of this madness.

In one of the cottages that had been brought from Maramureş lived a newly-married couple with whom I made great friends. They had a small son just over eighteen months old. This young man gave me endless amusement by walking up and down dressed in a hat, coat and trousers that were exact replicas of his father's garments. His mother was so beautiful that it almost caught your breath to look at her. There was a great sadness in this household. It hung in the air like wood smoke that permeated the house.

One day the woman took the child on her lap and rocked him to sleep, singing a quiet tune without any words. Outside in the yard, her husband was making hurdles. We had eaten together from the same dish of *polenta* and curds. Without realising that I was thinking aloud I asked her, "Why are you so unhappy, Maria?"

She did not appear to have heard, but gazed down at the child now curled up in her arms. In a flat-dead voice she answered, "How can the people of Maramureş be happy?"

Then followed a story of how her family had been completely broken up by the redistribution of

Hungary territory after the last war. Most of her dearest friends and relations lived on the other side of the frontier in the new Hungary. Her husband was less affected, for he had always lived in the southern parts of the province, and although his entire family were Magyars, they had at least been cut off *en masse* when the Rumanians seized their land. To-day they are forced to speak a foreign tongue, pay taxes to a foreign government and forget that they ever had any contact with Hungary. The honour of having their house transferred to Luna Bucureștilor made the story all the more ironical.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I HAD a strange invitation whilst chatting in the house of some Bulgaro-Vlachs who had been sent to show off their house at the Exhibition. They suggested that I should go with their eldest son, who was returning to the village near Craiova to represent the family at a second burial of their grandfather. These people in the district of Oltenia are the descendants of the original Bulgarian population that colonised the land in the north of the Danube. They have many peculiar beliefs in common with the Macedonians, who live hundreds of miles away round Djerdjelija.

Primitive people have a great terror of the dead, and in the Balkans this terror takes a very active and convincing form. The police are frequently called in to assist in the solving of mysteries surrounding the appearance of creatures that have been seen lurking about near the graves of the newly dead.

The grandfather of this family had the misfortune to die during the "Unclean Days" that fall between Christmas and Epiphany. Knowing that his soul was passing over at the most dangerous time of the year when the whole universe of evil is set against the safety of man, the old man had made his children swear that they would give him a second burial on his Saint's day five years after

death. If they broke this oath the consequences would be too terrifying to contemplate. The dead have powers of sending horrible calamities and hauntings if they are offended.

We arrived in the late afternoon after a long drive from the station, making good progress at a speed that was unsafe but exciting. Preparations had already started at the house where I was to spend the next two nights.

At sunrise the entire household, accompanied by friends of the late grandfather, walked in silence to the graveyard behind the village church. A sexton met us at the gate and threw holy water over each member of the procession before we were allowed to pass.

Graded in age and importance, the men stood facing the women on each side of the grave, whilst the priest came out of the church carrying a spade, a cross and a lighted candle of dark brown wax. He blessed the crowd and said a short prayer, giving the spade to the eldest man present and the candle to the youngest child. The grave was then opened, and at a depth of some five feet I heard the spade strike against a coffin board. One by one the oldest men fished the bones out of the black earth and arranged them on the sheet. A wisp of white hair still stuck to the back of the skull.

The excavation took rather a long time, and its gruesomeness was accentuated by the deadly silence of the ceremony. During two hours nobody had spoken, and the only sounds that one heard were the dull muffled thuds of the shovel scraping away the earth.

When the last bone was arranged, four unmarried



men carried the sheet by the corners. We formed up in a line as before and walked behind them. Three times we circled the church—still nobody spoke. It was getting on my nerves. Then without any warning the young men in charge of the sheet folded it over into a sort of hammock and ran out of the churchyard with their burden, as though all the devils in Hell were chasing them.

The rest of the assembly went into the church for a Requiem Service. By the icon of Christ on the right side of the Iconostas rested a photograph of the dead man, and during the Mass, a priest came out and censed the photograph to chase away the evil influences that might be at work during this very solemn moment when his spirit was actually standing in the congregation. Everybody had a lighted candle; the church was aglow with golden light.

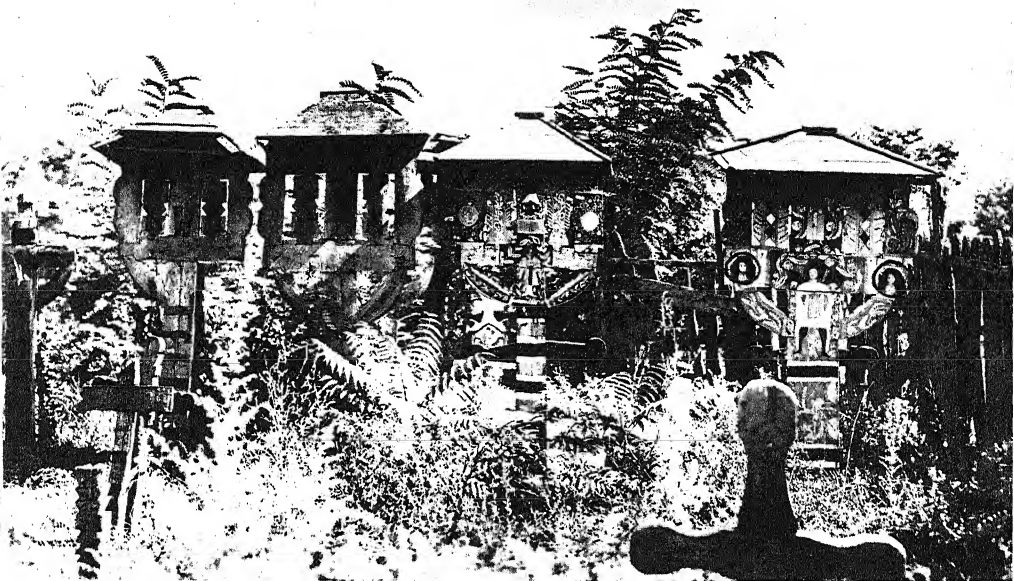
After the service the photograph was wrapped in a white shroud and taken out of the church by the old man who had done the excavating. We were met at the church door by the young men who had brought back their sheet rolled into a tight screw like a barber's pole. They had left the bones in a white cotton bag by the side of the grave. The skull alone remained exposed and grinning on top of a little mound of earth. The youngest child walked forward and let the hot wax from his candle drip into the open grave while the old man washed the skull with new wine and wiped it dry with the shroud that had been wrapped round the photograph. He kissed the skull and laid it gently inside his own fur cap.

All was now ready for the hallowing of the bones, and the small boy with the candle went off to fetch the priest, who came out of the north door of the church with two jars—one of oil and one of wine. He poured a little of each liquid into the grave and the people knelt down and covered their faces. At this moment the very earth was being hallowed and the spirits of evil banished for ever from tormenting the man who had died during the "Unclean Days."

The bag of bones was next exorcised and replaced in the grave. Last of all came the touching ceremony of anointing the skull and greeting the spirit of the dead man. We all filed past the priest, who held the skull out to be kissed. Tears filled my eyes at the sight of those simple men and women stooping to kiss the last remains of one who had once been dear to them. They stroked the brown, cracked bone and whispered a greeting. The body was laid to rest a second time, and the promise of the living to the dead had been properly kept. We left the sexton to fill in the grave and walked back to the house, where a great spread was in store for all who had honoured the family with their presence. I believe that the sincerity of the ceremony I had attended would have moved the most hardened sceptic.

Civilisation gives us a veneer of superficiality that is only too brittle when faced with the stark reality of any primitive force. ¹Many people have

¹ c.f. "Narodni Običaji" pp. 466-7 *et seq.* published 1927 Edition de l' Academie Royale de Belgrade.



"THE NEW CROSS."

"THE PEOPLE KNELT DOWN AND COVERED THEIR FACES."



read about vampires and werewolves and thought it rather a joke. Nothing will shake my acceptance of the phenomena reported wherever you go in certain parts of the Balkans. These mysteries are only a joke to the fool. The wise man goes to see for himself before casting judgment.

During the meal I talked with several peasants, who told me a great many facts about vampires and their activities. They explained to me in great detail how that during the "Unclean Days" the whole earth is reigned over by the forces of Evil. At this time the dead hate the living and turn them into vampires wherever possible. Naturally, if a man has the misfortune to be taken ill and die during this period, his relatives take special precautions on his behalf. On no account must the corpse be left alone until placed in the coffin, lest the spirits make an attack upon it.

Immediately after the burial service the congregation leave the church and the wise woman of the village takes a sharp iron spike, specially made for the purpose, and drives it clean through the body, taking care to put the point on the navel and guide the iron so that it forces its way out of a hole at the bottom of the coffin. The lid is then replaced.

For the dead person to become a vampire the corpse must swell up; therefore, if it is punctured completely, any such swelling is rendered impossible. But this treatment by no means guarantees the safety of the deceased. Should a pig, cat or fowl walk across the grave within six days of death, there is danger of the lower intelligences using such

defilement to tamper with the corpse. So a fence is built and lights are kept burning perpetually.

"Evil cannot enter into the presence of a lighted Church candle," one old woman explained to me.

Vampires appear in various forms, but chiefly as human beings. They are believed to be boneless, gelatinous beings composed of blood. In appearance their eyes are red and their hair, however long and thick, stands up from the head like a dog's. By day they live in deserted graveyards, hiding from the light in holes in the ground, but by night they wander abroad looking for food and even visiting their wives and children. They have revolting sensual appetites, and catch young widows and children in order to gratify their cravings. Blood and liver constitute the sole diet of these monsters, and if they engage in some sort of trade it is always one that involves the use of sharp instruments.

One of my informants was a most matter-of-fact man who had returned to the village after living for over twenty years in Salonica. He firmly avowed that he assisted to track down a vampire who lived in that town practising the trade of butcher¹.

The "butcher" was always busiest at sunset. Moreover he had never been known to take either the slaughtering knife or the steel yard during the daytime, but left such work to his assistants. As the years went past, it was noticed that the butcher never grew any older, and people began to regard him with suspicion when it was discovered that he

¹ Every detail of this story was subsequently corroborated by a Jewish Doctor with whom I have been exchanging correspondence for some years.

frequently visited new graves after midnight. One day a clairvoyant customer happened to notice that there was no shadow behind the butcher, even in broad daylight. He stupidly told his ideas to a man, who repeated them to the butcher.

The next night the clairvoyant was found strangled, sucked dry of blood and floating in the Vardar. For weeks the death of the unfortunate man remained a mystery. Nor did the matter rest here, for three people who had offended the vampire disappeared one after another and were never seen again. At length six men took an oath upon a certain icon that they would neither sleep, eat or drink until the murders were explained, and the culprit brought to justice. Armed with wreaths of garlic and mandrake—the most potent charms against attack by vampires—they forced an entry to the butcher's shop and found him, knife in hand, eating human liver. Tearing their magic wreaths from their arms, they flung them at the butcher who, with a fearful shriek, disappeared in a welter of blood that sprang out of the ground like a fountain. The whole shop was burned to the ground and the stench of decaying bodies remained in the vicinity for forty days. The butcher was never seen again.

During the afternoon a troupe of magic dancers called Caluşari arrived in the village. They had been specially invited by the dead man's family to dance in his memory and also to bring them a year's good fortune. With a shout of joy I recognised eight of them as being members of the very same troupe that had visited us in London for the 1935

Dance Congress. They remembered me and asked scores of questions about the various people they had met in England. Some thousands of English people saw their dances when they performed at the Albert Hall and Cecil Sharp House, and the impression they made was so profound that their name is still a topic of conversation. I do not think that any one who was present could ever forget that wonderful first night when they danced in the garden behind the Museum in St. James's Park.

There are certain resemblances between the dances and rituals of the Russalija¹ and the Calușari, but their general appearance and equipment are not related. The Calușari Dance during the week before and after Whitsun, when the malevolent Powers are at war with the Good Fairies. There may be some relationship between our own May-Day revels and this far-distant Rumanian practice, but I have yet to find any tangible evidence in support of this theory or even greater guesswork that connects the Morris Men with the Calușari. It seems to me that the Morris Dance is much nearer a Fertility Rite, whereas the Calușari Ritual has a greater resemblance to the Dervish idea of self-exorcisation and magical battles with the forces of Evil.

The essential difference between the Russalija and the Calușari is the appearance of a very realistic and terrifying Wicked One (*Diabolus*) who dances with the Calușari, doing his best to make chaos and confusion out of their extremely intricate movements. I am convinced that the Wicked One is no

¹ Described on p. 148

mere counterpart of the Lord of Misrule; he is a survival of the Dualistic theories of Zoroastrianism. In other words he is none other than an *objectivised* Ahriman, the chief principle and Creator of Darkness. The Calușari (generally twelve in number) symbolise Ormuzd the Creator of Light and Order. There is another theory that the Wicked One is a Scape Goat, because he is maltreated and beaten by the other dancers during one part of the Ritual. But this conjecture—for it is nothing more—does not fit in with the perfectly simple explanation given to me that afternoon at Prodila village. The leader of the troupe used these actual words: “When we dance we have to call on the Good Fairies in order to get their help to fight Him”—pointing to the Wicked One—“and if we are dancing well the Fairies take us up in the air, and we become “different” men. That is why we are able to float in the air while dancing.”

Much of what I have written and am about to write concerning these dances, may seem pathetically childish to some more materialistic readers, but I can assure them that the phenomena that take place during the weeks near Whitsun are not only common knowledge all over the Danubian plains, but are regarded as being of sufficient importance to warrant the careful investigation of scientific authorities in Rumania, Bulgaria and Jugoslavija.

In the Duboka area of N.E. Jugoslavija there takes place quite regularly at this time of the year an outbreak of involuntary trances, during which certain women go off into fits of spirit-possession

lasting as long as forty-five minutes. Whilst I was in Belgrad the newspaper *Polilika* came out (on 8th June) giving a full-page report with illustrations of the affected women. I had every intention of going to Duboka to see these women, and the curious dances that are performed to bring them back to life again, but was unable to obtain any information about the locality. There is an obvious connection between the theory of dances that are performed at Duboka and the Calușari, for the whole essence of their dance is to bring good fortune to anybody who witnesses the ritual and to exorcise the very earth itself from the baneful influence of the evil spirits.

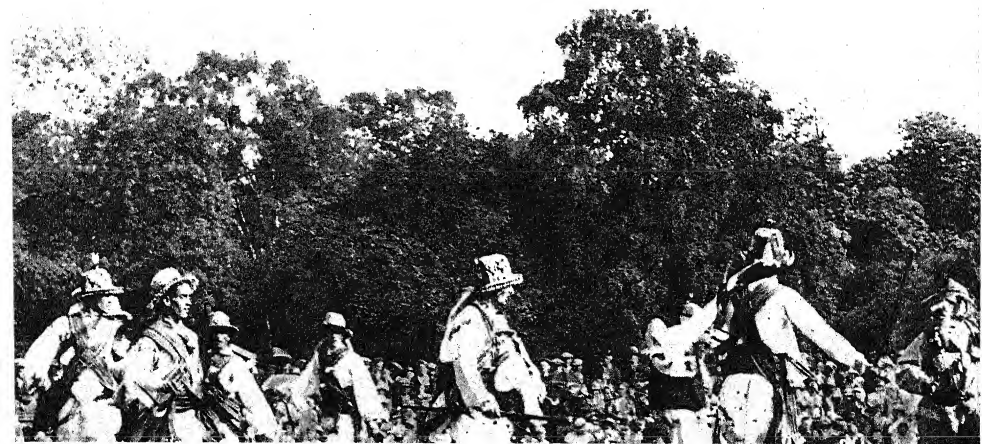
Each dancer carries a magic sword-wand in the right hand, using it as a sort of walking stick when marching round between the various figures. There is a wonderful moment in the dance when the wands are used as a means for temporary levitation. The dancers pair off and the odd numbers change over their wands to the left hand, grasping the shoulders with the right. In this formation they have a stick supporting each couple (rather like crutches) and proceed to execute astonishing feats of balance, dancing for several seconds at a time with the feet a good eighteen inches clear of the ground. At this moment they experience an ecstasy that results in temporary levitation.

During the whole dance the Calușari shout out the names of their particular Fairy and join together in unison cries. From the first moment I heard these names and the rhythmic swing of the



SCHOOLGIRLS DANCING IN BULGARIA.

CALUŞARI DANCING IN LAMBETH PALACE GARDENS, 1935.



incantation that marks each phase of the ritual, I could not help thinking of the identical shouting that is part of the Wajang Dance in Bali. The rhythms in both cases are so similar that as I danced with the Calușari that afternoon I was able to shout the Balinese formula so that it synchronised exactly.

There are stories of extraordinary cures that have taken place during the dancing of the Calușari, and whenever they form a chain or circle, members of the crowd try to step inside the magic ring. "He who is touched by a Calușar will have good luck." So runs the proverb. Shortly after sunset they stopped dancing and we sat down to another enormous meal. No questions were asked about my behaviour—it was taken for granted that if I felt compelled to dance with them, then I had a perfect right to do so.

The Diabolos had to sit by himself behind a screen where he could not be seen. He looked very lonely, but nobody dare go anywhere near him for fear of contamination. Because he could not take off his disguise in public, he had to eat and drink whilst still wearing the mask.

The derivation and meaning of the word Calușari are somewhat curious. Caluș = a horse, ar = diminutive suffix, i.e., little. Thus the plural form which adds an "i" literally means Little Horses—or Little Horse Dancers. Each movement of the dance has its special name. The only two that have stuck in my memory are Caluceanul—the Little Horse and Floricica Calușalui—the "Flower of the Little Horse." As to the Fairies' names, the only three I heard that afternoon were Frumoasele,

Ielele and Dinsele and it is almost impossible to translate them into English, except perhaps *Frumoasele* which could mean "The Lovely One." In any case, the men flatly refused to discuss this topic, so I supposed that they had excellent reasons for not talking about the Fairies after the dance had finished. Shortly after the meal the whole troupe left the village.

The rest of us spent the evening dancing, eating and, of course, talking. Of all the Balkan races, the Rumanians are the best conversationalists. They never seem to tire, and manage to hold the interest of their audience. I sometimes believe that I should still be there, chattering away, if it had not been for the fact that I had to return the next morning to Bucureşti for a special dinner-party.

Before driving back to Craiova they insisted that I should go and see the beautiful new Cross that had been erected over grandfather's grave. It was worth turning aside to see and would bring me a year's happiness if I touched it and had a wish—so said the head of the household where I had been so welcome a guest.

The cross with its bright new paintings was a colourful antidote for the Demons. A sort of penthouse had been fixed to the top of the cross in order to protect the paintings, and also to act as a convenient shelter where the Angels could sit whenever they came to visit the grave. I took a picture of the Cross, and we all said Good-bye standing at the graveside.

CHAPTER TWENTY

ONE evening I came back to the hotel and found three messages from various newspaper offices saying that they had unsuccessfully tried to locate me for an interview and would be sending representatives in the morning.

At what then seemed early dawn—in reality it was eight o'clock—a man came into my bedroom and started the interview before I was even properly awake. He wore his hat all the time, just like the American Newshawks on the screen and talked extremely quickly in muffled French. He had been given a copy of my last book, *The Voice of Atlas*, and had come to write me up as a celebrity. All this was of course, very flattering, but extraordinarily inconvenient. I ventured to say as much to him, but the fact that I was sitting up in bed barely awake, had no disconcerting aspects for him. He had come for News and he intended to have News.

How did I like București? Was I impressed by the Military strength of the country? Did I think Rumanian women were equal to English women—or Moroccan women? These, and other questions far more intimate, were fired at me as I wandered about the room, dressing myself. The cross-examination was interrupted by another man, less aggressive than the first but on the same errand. I refused to answer any more questions until properly

clothed, so they reluctantly went down to wait in the hall.

Some short time later, there appeared the most garbled account of my "Life Story" that any Sunday Paper reader could wish to see. In the bigger of the two journals I discovered a picture of a man with a pig's face, wearing a *fez*—it was labelled "Domnul Thornton." Evidently something had slipped in the apparatus when they were making the picture, for I shall have to undergo even further facial disfigurement before I resemble their reproduction.

Even a trying interview has its purpose. One of the reporters—the less aggressive one—was very keen that I should have an opportunity of seeing something of a curious religious sect of self-mutilators called the Skoptzi (or Skopeți). We therefore arranged to meet on the next evening and afterwards drive out to a village some twenty miles outside București where these people met in secret once a month. They are compelled to take this precaution because the State will not tolerate their behaviour, which, to say the least of it, is extremely unpleasant.

The word Skopets in Russian signifies a Eunuch, and from it the sect derive their name. Russia has long been famous for the vast numbers of religious sects that have sprung up within her boundaries.

Fantastic though these societies may be, I do not think I have ever listened to any more astounding story than the origin and practices of the Skoptzi. They came into being as long ago as 1772, when a

half-mad woman called Akulina Ivanovna—already a suspect frequently imprisoned—broke away from the particular sect she then patronised and founded an even more puritanical Society of her own, where castration and other repulsive acts of self-mutilation formed the final state of complete virginity and holiness.

By the year 1800 the Society had increased enormously, this may in part be attributed to the careful propaganda of an even greater charlatan, called Selivanov. This man propounded the weirdest doctrines of his own, and like anything sufficiently bizarre in the theological world, they caught the fancy of those who had nothing better to occupy themselves. His doctrine was a jumble of mad politics and deliberate falsification of the Biblical account of Eden and its inhabitants.

In order to lend an air of plausibility to his "message" he announced that Napoleon was the son of Catherine II. of Russia, that the woman Akulina Ivanovna was the prototype of Elizabeth the Virgin Mother of Peter III. that the Devil lived in Turkey (headquarters unspecified) and that the real reason that Catherine the Great conspired against Peter III. was on account of his impotence! The justification of self-mutilation was contained in his interpretation of the Fall of Adam and Eve, who were created sexless and totally without sin.

When these curious creatures listened to the voice of the Serpent and ate of the Apple of Knowledge, not only were their eyes opened but their sinful action was rewarded by the immediate growth and

development of these organs that they hitherto lacked¹. Therefore, the only way of attaining real holiness was to cut away these offending appendages for in so doing the Skopet restored himself to a true state of Original Virginity.

Rather naturally both the Russian Church and State persecuted these mad fanatics and drove them over the border into what was then Moldovia and Wallacia. To-day they are reported to be strongest in Jassy and round the Danube Delta and meet in semi-secrecy to avoid publicity rather than persecution. I asked my guide the reporter how he had become acquainted with their whereabouts near Bucureşti. However, he refused this information, adding that it would be a breach of a sacred promise if he gave away his informants' names. In fact, I have no idea at all where he drove me that evening, for we went out of the city by a road that I had never seen before, and walked across a swamp to a deserted farmhouse in the middle of nowhere. The place looked gloomy and unpleasant as we stood outside the high walls of the outer yard. He banged on the door and we were admitted by a man carrying a small lamp. His face was like that of a fourteen-years-old boy, but puffy and finely lined. He was a typical Skoptzi—castrated probably at the age of eighteen. We entered the house and took our places at the back of a large room where thirty men and women were sitting in orderly rows waiting for their "Angel" to come in and start off the meeting.

¹ The two halves of the forbidden apple grew on the woman Eve as breasts, and the stalk and pips supplied Adam with his organs.

The atmosphere was rather akin to the beginning of an Amy Semple McPherson Revivalist Meeting. Bit by bit they worked themselves up into a state of dithering religious madness, praying and singing with great fervour.

A little later the praying gave place to shouting and jumping up and down, for when the Spirit descends upon them they believe that they ought to react in some fitting manner. This horrible spectacle went on for about half an hour and then their hysteria subsided as quickly as it had developed.

The service was over. I took careful note of the faces that I saw in that room. Almost without exception the men had the same unearthly pallor and agelessness, some looked like Mongolian cretins, but were quite obviously mentally developed. The women had flat, dead expressions, their eyes moved in their sockets like those of a person wearing a mask.

Outside in the cool evening air, the reporter turned to me and said with the same sort of gaiety that one feels after a good show at the theatre, "*Vous êtes amusés? C'est joli ça, n'est ce pas?*" We went back to a café near the Nord Station to drink Suika while I tried to get down some facts that he had told me about the Skoptzi.

They choose their elect from amongst the finest physical types, often selecting persons who have married and begotten several children. Then, in a completely secret place, they meet for the dread purpose of amputating the organs of the Elect. This operation has to be done by the Elect themselves with red-hot shears or knives. Nobody must

help them, for each member must mutilate himself quite unaided. Before this self-mutilation can take place the whole assembly have to work themselves into a state of wildest frenzy, so they start the service early in the evening and continue all night until the moment has arrived when the Spirit forces those prepared for the ordeal to seize the red-hot weapons and perform what they believe to be the highest act of self-purification.

Only a few live through the ordeal, tetanus and septicæmia account for a fair number of victims, but those that survive are treated with the greatest respect and the men are often given a beautifully-equipped carriage and horses in order to earn their living as coachmen. Many of the smartest fiacres plying for hire in the streets of Bucureşti belong to wealthy Skoptzi.

Rumour connects a certain famous minister with the practices of this sect, and his remarkable physical appearance certainly warrants speculation upon these lines, for his facial expression is that of a typical castratus. I noticed this particularly when meeting him outside a Government building. Bucureşti is full of rumour. One hears, for instance, that Madame Lupescu is provided with nine "doubles," all of whom are dressed and made up to look so like her that when she goes shopping nine other Lupescus also go out at the same time, but in different directions. The chances of King Carol's lady meeting with a sudden end are thus cut down by the odds of nine to one. A few years ago there may have been some precautions taken on these lines,

but I heard nothing that would lead a foreigner to believe that such elaborate theatricals were necessary to-day.

The day before I was due to fly to Sophia, Constantinescu suggested a trip to the monastery of Caldarușani where he wanted to show me the famous frescos and the lake where the monks caught a special sort of crayfish. We drove out through Baneâsa past the Air-port and along an excellent road that ran straight and even, over the undulating plain. It was very peaceful and beautiful.

"Well," said he, "have you enjoyed Rumania?"

"So much that I can barely find courage to go to Sophia to-morrow," I answered.

"And what have you seen?" He was anxious to know about everything that had interested me in the closely-packed weeks I had spent roaming about the country.

"One thing I cannot understand is the completely unique attitude of the Orthodox Church towards the things that western Europeans call superstition and folk lore. That re-burial party, for instance, is characteristic of the way in which your Church has entered into the actual life of the people. Why is this?"

Constantinescu wiped his glasses with a blue, silk handkerchief and replaced them in silence.

"You will meet a man at Caldarușani who can answer all such questions," he replied quietly. We drove on in silence, and arrived at the monastery a little later.

Etiquette forbids the visitor to drive up to the

monastery gates. He must walk up and ring the outer bell, and be admitted by the white-haired janitor. We were shown into a long sunny room looking out over the lake, to await the Archmandrite who ruled over the Community.

He came slowly into the room and greeted us both with a blessing. I was kissed on the forehead, but Constantinescu was kissed fervently on both cheeks, for he and the Archmandrite were friends of long standing. We sat at a long table and chatted, whilst a lay brother set out a dish of cold fish, hard-boiled eggs and bread. The first duty of the monastery is to offer hospitality to the pilgrim.

No questions are ever asked until refreshment has been taken. I felt as though I was re-living a moment of time that had happened before. Perhaps it was the feeling of comfort inspired by the kind grave face of our host who looked exactly like my childhood picture of God the Father. His eyes were pale green, like young grass, and round his shoulders hung pure-white hair—long and as clean as new snow. While he spoke he sometimes stroked his beard, but this rarely, for the most part the hands rested in the lap of his grey cassock.

A stone jar of new wine was brought in and placed on the table. Once refreshed, it is the pilgrim's duty to see the Church and make his offering of prayer and alms.

The interior of the Monastery Church at Caldaruşani is a breathless sight with its silver iconostas studded with exquisite icons enamelled or painted on



CALDARUȘANI MONASTERY.

DANCING FOR THE DEAD AT DUBOKA.



to the woodwork beneath the metal casing. There is scarcely a square foot of wall-space that is not covered with frescos of saints, martyrs and Biblical characters. The silent figures themselves gave me the answer to that question I had put to Constantinescu. The icon and the fresco were no mere paint and wood, they were as real to the men who made them as photographs of their friends.

When he stands up and recites his creed, affirming his belief in the Communion of the Saints, the words are no mere formula of a vague dogma, because he is surrounded by the very people he is talking about; they and he worship in one common fellowship. The whole life of the Orthodox Christian is coloured by this consciousness of the Unseen who is perpetually present whether he is in Church or milking his cow. Therefore, it is only reasonable that if he meets the Saints as his friends when in Church, then the Powers of Evil are just as likely to be wandering about in the unhallowed places. It would be a lop-sided faith that had no difficulty in accepting the presence of the Saints, yet rejected the equal possibility of Satan's servants standing ready to do their wicked work.

We left the Church and walked out of the Central buildings to the gardens that ran down a steep slope to the lakeside. On three sides, the monastery is protected by the lake which is shaped like a horseshoe. Five little boats floated on the still surface of the water, they were only hollowed out of tree trunks like the "dug-outs" of the Congo tribes, and had no keels or outriggers to steady their

course, but their occupants paddled about with complete assurance.

Constantinescu went off to see another friend of his who was working at the other end of the lake, so I was left alone with the Archmandrite. I still hankered after some more satisfactory explanation of the question I had tried to solve and asked him if he could explain his Church's attitude to the re-burial rites I had seen in Oltenia.

"Listen, my son—after fifty years of the Religious Life I find myself more easily able to accept the phenomena that I once laughed at and thought ridiculous. Certain customs are inseparable from religious belief, and if the Church gives her help in combating the perpetually present Forces of Evil, then she is performing the most necessary service to her children. You will either learn to *accept* as I have done, or you will find no contact with the peasant mind."

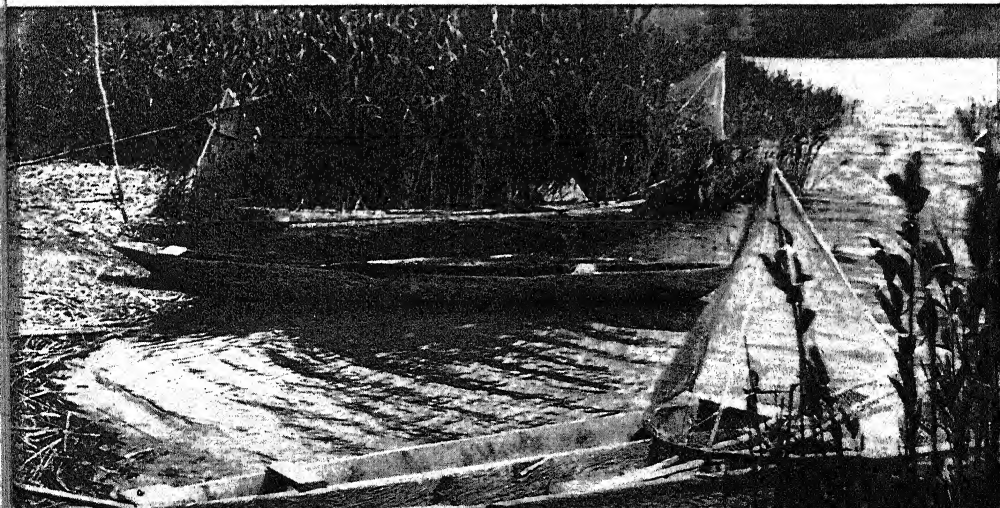
As he spoke, a dull booming sound grew louder and louder. It was the voice of the wooden gong that serves to call the monks to service. The little boats came ashore and the Archmandrite blessed me before he went back to his brethren.

I sat there watching the Lake, lost in a dream-world of saints and demons.



THE INNER COURTYARD AT CALDARUȘANI.

DUG-OUTS BY THE CALDARUȘANI LAKE.



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE Polish aeroplane was almost an hour late on arrival at Bucureşti airport on account of the adverse flying conditions it had encountered en route from Warsaw. My reason for going by air was a simple one. The journey from Bucureşti to Sophia by rail takes a whole day,¹ but only an hour and ten minutes by aeroplane. Experience has taught me that it is almost invariably cheaper to travel by air if you have little baggage. Meals on the train, tips, passport scenes, endless waiting at the frontier, porters and a score of other nuisances are avoided by air-travel and there is always free transport to your hotel at the other end of the journey. What can be more maddening than the wild fight for porters and the swindling demands of the taxi-man that await the traveller who arrives in a new country by train.

Comforting myself with all these considerations, I sat in the aeroplane whilst the mechanics read their last warnings about the weather conditions prevailing over the Balkan Range.

A following wind blew savagely at a height of 2,000 feet, and we made good progress. A Greek woman who sat opposite me had hysterics and had to be forcibly held into her seat by her husband.

¹ Or a night if you go by sleeper.

They were going to Salonica, said the husband, and each time Madame flew she had hysterics. The plane mounted another 1,800 feet and ran more steadily. We soon came to the Danube, lying like a broad band of rusty iron between swampy banks of smooth, chocolate earth and vivid, yellow patches of what I imagine must have been corn. So occupied in watching the ground below and the formation of the river where it split round a great diamond-shaped island, I was unaware of what was just ahead of us. Ignorance was indeed bliss, for I might otherwise have followed Madame's example.

We ran straight into a sepia-coloured darkness that was sufficiently terrifying by itself without the attendant thunder and lightning that split the heavens in spiteful jags. I covered my head with my coat, but promptly felt sick, so clutching to the chair I tried to think how interesting it was to watch a thunderstorm from above for a change. The Greek woman saved the situation by trying to swallow her husband's handkerchief. He enlisted my services in order to restrain her suicidal desires. The excitement of drawing the handkerchief out of her mouth with one hand and avoiding being bitten on the other that pulled down her jaw, put the storm out of my head, in fact, by the time we had pacified her, the plane had flown out of the darkness into brilliant sunshine.

In spite of the storm having passed, the machine continued to lurch about as we passed over the high range that separates the Central Bulgarian lowlands from the Danube. From the air the first glimpse of

Sophia is a pink and white blob of colour set in a field of green, as you draw nearer and slowly lose height the blob becomes broken up into shapes, and the Church roofs stand up from the general mass of buildings.

Bucureşti does its best to ape Paris—but Sophia is just Sophia and apes nobody else's capital. For this reason it has an atmosphere entirely of its own making. We drove to the city over a road that rivals the worst tracks in Albania—but in the bus they hastened to explain that this was not the usual way into Sophia, because the proper road was under repair. I saw many things that reminded me of Tetuan, and nothing that gave the slightest impression that one was entering a fair-sized city and a capital of an important state. But Sophia possesses the most efficient hotel in the Balkans.

At the "SLAVJANSKA BESEDA" you can have a beautiful room with a private bath for a little more than 5s. a day. No cockroaches wander beneath the bed as in Roumania, nor did I find any dead fleas stuck to the pillowslip's undersurface.

In some mysterious way I always arrive in foreign capitals on the day before a national fête. Almost any foreigner is a potential source of alarm to the Authorities, particularly if he goes to watch processions where Kings and Princes can be assassinated by the pulling of a trigger. A quiet-voiced man came to visit me within half an hour of my arrival at the hotel. He was some sort of police official and had come to check up on my movements in the Capital, for the next day was the great feast of

S.S. Cyril and Methodius. He carefully read my papers of recommendation from the Ministerium and hastened to explain how necessary it had become to take precaution about the movements of aliens. The sincerity of the man and his courteous behaviour prompted me to ring the bell and offer him a glass of tea.

"No, Monsieur, I must excuse myself from such an honour, for there are several other people I have to see this afternoon."

More than a thousand years ago two brothers were sent out from Constantinople on the perilous errand of converting the Bulgars to Christianity. The tribes they met spoke various strange languages and derivatives of the original Slavonic tongue. It was quite impossible to preach to these Barbarians in Latin or Greek and since the Missal and Testaments only existed in these two languages something had to be done before their converts could in any measure enjoy the church services. So the two brothers set to work and translated the Missal and Scriptures into Old Slavonic. Methodius, who had once been an artist, designed the alphabet which, with slight modifications, is in use to this day. No sooner did the Pope Nicholas I. hear of the enterprise of these two young men, than he promptly summoned them back to Rome to give an account of themselves. The Holy Synod was at that moment debating the advisability of permitting the office to be said in any language other than Latin.

The brothers were received with great enthusiasm and interest on account of the miraculous recovery

by S. Cyril of S. Clement's body from the bed of the Dnieper. Moreover, S. Cyril's brilliant defence of the new script—known henceforth as Cyrillic—and reports of the missionary work quite won the day. Saint Cyril was superior to the ridiculous Roman prejudice that ordinary languages are unfit for sacred uses.

From early morning the streets were thronged with thousands of school children marching with bands playing to attend the Commemoration Service at the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral.

At the close of the service the Minister of Education addressed the children for a few minutes before the Solemn Benediction. He spoke with complete sincerity and called the children "my good friends," urging them to remember the example of the saintly brothers who had given them their alphabet, their religious freedom and their own version of the Scriptures. I watched the faces of that child audience. They were listening with genuine interest, and when the speaker got down from the rostrum the applause was deafening. Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius are the Orthodox guardians of all educational enterprise, and later in the day the children marched in a procession three miles long, carrying enormous placards and devotional pictures. One detachment of little people in the Kindergarten section marched proudly past carrying the thirty-two letters of the Bulgarian alphabet contrasted with their original forms as invented by Methodius.

In the afternoon Raina Katzarova somehow wangled for a Military car to take us out to see the

dancing in a village near Radomir. We were driven by a young soldier who raced over the roads quite oblivious of his two passengers' discomfort as they grovelled about on the floor each time he swung the machine to avoid the innumerable pot-holes on the dirt track. The air was heavy and very hot. Black clouds were piling up behind Mount Vitosh as we skirted round the woods and came out overlooking the plain.

I have forgotten the name of the village where we stopped after the two-hour drive, for we were there only for about a quarter of an hour before the heavens opened and let fall a tropical downpour.

We raced to the car and huddled together for warmth, for now the sun had been blotted out it became bitterly cold.

At Prnik we stopped to eat a bowl of *kisselo mljeko*¹ and dry bread. The café was crowded with peasants chatting and drinking coffee or spirits. They asked us where we came from and sympathised on hearing that I had come specially from England to see them dancing.

One man said that he understood that it rained every day in England all the year round and this explained why the inhabitants went all over the earth to escape getting wet. Nobody laughed at his remark, for it was made in all seriousness. Before I left to go back to the car they made me write my name on the whitewashed wall behind the bar. Perhaps some traveller will one day come back from Bulgaria with a story that he has seen a curious

¹ Sour sheep's milk.

hieroglyphic formula written on the plaster of an inn at Prnik—but it will only be:

“Here Philip Thornton came in vain
To see the dancing and escape the rain.”

Sophia can be very gloomy in foul weather. There are no buses to take you anywhere near the business quarter of the town and the trams only appear to serve the suburbs. From the hotel to the Narodna Banka was only ten minutes' walk, and to the Ethnological Museum perhaps five, but both journeys were long enough to get thoroughly soaked. One morning I took a taxi to the British Legation and found the tariff to be even higher than it is in Bristol. There are also fiacres that ply for hire at a more reasonable price but unfortunately their upholstery is so infested with fleas and small bugs that I preferred to walk in the rain.

On the Saturday before Whitsunday, I was invited to lunch by the parents of my Bulgarian tutoress. I had not realised, until meeting her parents, what an extraordinary thing it was for a very eligible and attractive girl to insist on leaving her home in Sophia to study Child Education in London. No time was lost in asking dozens of questions about their daughter's health, her progress and her capabilities, and, having exhausted that topic of conversation, they turned on me and asked about my family—was I married—how old was I—how many brothers and sisters—what did I think of Sophia. Then, when I had given a brief outline of my life history and followed it up with an account

of the places I had visited on the present journey, Gospodin A. launched off into a terrific tirade about the honesty and integrity of the English, their deep religious convictions and their superiority over "all the Aryan nonsense of that swine, Hitler." Gospodin A. was a Jew. Then he enlarged on the enormities of the Rumanians, describing them as the degenerates of the Balkans, and declaring that every other woman you met in the streets of Bucureşti not only looks like a prostitute, but also behaves like one.

I listened awestruck as he piled on the withering comments about the country I had so recently left. Here, at last, was Bulgarian public opinion speaking for itself without any reserve or fear. As I walked back to the hotel, the sun came out blazing hot, and dried the streets, and I felt that I had learned more in those two hours of conversation than I had managed to find out in twelve weeks.

One is apt to forget that the Bulgars are essentially different from the Serbs, not merely in customs and speech but in origin. The Tartar hordes that swept down from the Crimea lodged in the territory south of the Danubian frontier. Even after two thousand years of Christianity and inter-marriage with dozens of foreign stocks, the Tartar is still the predominant strain in the Bulgarian type. Hard-working, serious and intensely patriotic, they are jeered at by their neighbours the Serbs and Rumanians, but they are too intelligent to care about such trivialities, and are slowly building up a well-organised and united state. I am convinced

that if they could only obtain whole-hearted economic support from some foreign Power they would make amazing advances in every direction.

The hectic activity of the preceding months and that strange fever that I had picked up in Dubrovnik now began to tell on my nerves in a most unpleasant way. Each evening the glands in my neck would swell up and ache unbearably—so much so that it was often impossible to button up my shirt collar. Raina thought it was the advent of a carbuncle, but somehow I knew instinctively that it was something else, and a Swiss doctor staying in the hotel brightly agreed that it was “a symptom of a most curious malady.” But he offered no sensible help. During the next week it rained in torrents and I sat about reading the *Daughter of Smyrna*—the present from the Turkish bank official in Istanbul.

I shall always believe that *The Daughter of Smyrna* did a good deal towards restoring my sense of balance, for I was depressed and miserable on account of feeling so unwell. There were moments when I closed the book and rolled on the bed, hooting with uncontrolled laughter. The author's English was fantastic enough at the best, but whenever there was a patch of melodrama or conversation it became almost too good to be true. The story concerned a young Turkish woman—a passionate Nationalist—who had been widowed during the landing of the Greek army at Smyrna. Her name is Aysha, and she goes to Istanbul to help ferment the rebellion

against the Greek occupation. Of her character and general appearance the author says:

"Her distinguishing trait was that she scrupulously eschewed picking holes in others . . . her black dress was patched here and there and she was always busy with her needles. Now she would do the knitting-work, now she would make clothes for the children of Smyrna. She lived on the earning of her handicraft or coaching-fee. Whatever of cash she possessed was reserved. In this connection she went on a round of visits to several houses, but none of the inmates could get an inkling of the mystery that enveloped her.

"Aysha possessed all those virtues that go to make a patriotic woman"—continues the story; "she was an embodiment of vigour, determination and smartness, sincerity of purpose and spirit of self-sacrifice. She combined these virtues with the important habit of regularity."

Enough about the heroine! The high spot in the story tells how a young man falls in love with her, but she cools down his passions by insisting on taking him to a political meeting in the Park near the Saint Sophia Mosque. Her would-be lover is completely overcome at the scene in the park and transfers his activities and interest to the Nationalist cause.

"Every man or woman who enters the Park bursts into tears at the sight of the Ottoman flag in black. Even the youthful damsels who are very particular about their paint and powder cannot control their tears which flood

down their cheeks and wash these precious decorations off."

So the young man enlists in the Expeditionary Force that is to march on Smyrna—but before he leaves he writes Aysha a wonderful letter in which he makes the astounding remark:

"I, too, had a shirt of flames round my body and it was a habit with you, to fan the flames of this mysterious shirt so that the spark of independence within the heart should not get extinguished nor should the storm of restlessness in the bosoms subside."

He gets both his legs blown off in helping to take Smyrna and is sent to a military hospital where Aysha writes him a not very comforting letter:

"Dear Biyami,

"On ascertaining that it has been discovered that you are bedridden, I have mentioned this strange incident to Saifi. Your illness is drawing rather too long.

"Aysha. (Signed)"

The story ends with one last outburst of inflammatory patriotism from the dying Biyami. Parts of the book are so funny that it would almost be worth publishing it in England. I could not have chosen a better place to read such stuff than Sophia—the most enigmatic place I have yet stayed in for any length of time.

A traveller must have personal experience of a country's poverty if he wishes to mention it in

relation to the other States he has visited. In Bulgaria the circulation of money is so small that a peasant who can earn a few leva to purchase a handful of sugar, counts himself a fortunate man. Sometimes I went out to the neighbouring villages and sat about chatting with the peasants. The women, even when sitting down for a rest in the evening, worked incessantly with a hank of wool and a primitive spindle, spinning yarn for winter garments. Their attitude to me as a total stranger was invariably friendly and courteous, and even though there were often long periods of silence when we mutually lost our tongues, it was not the awkward hiatus of English drawing-room conversation, but a genuine quietness that the simple-hearted alone can appreciate.

One old woman, bent almost double with age, took a great fancy to a white handkerchief that held up my trousers. She fingered the fine surface of the linen and inquired who had made it. Had my sister spun so fine a thread? I had to confess that it was machine-made, and so saying, untied it and gave it to her for a souvenir. Her wrinkled face shone with pleasure as she stretched it out on her lap to smooth out the creases. "*Mnogo Khubuv—az sum mnogo blogadaren,*" she chuckled, and sent off one of her grand-daughters to fetch something to take the place of the handkerchief. Until the child came back I was a prisoner, chained to the bench where we sat, because my trousers were too loose to stay up for long. This amused the old crone enormously and she cracked several jokes with her friends at my expense.

When at last the grand-daughter came back she was carrying a belt of woven leather thongs embroidered with exquisite designs in gold thread and scarlet.

"But this is not for me, Mother," I remonstrated, when the old woman tied it round my waist. She would take no refusal. The belt was mine, had not I first offered her a present? What more natural thing than that she should offer me one in exchange of friendship.

We never met again, but somehow I believe that when I go back to that village on the side of Vitosh Mountain, she will still be sitting there in the sun, spinning and cracking jokes about the crazy Angliski who once gave her a linen handkerchief.

C O D A

ON Saturday evening before Whitsun, the weather suddenly changed for the better, and the great Feast of Pentecost was blessed with wonderful sunshine and warmth. Everybody looked happy and gay, because it was not only a glorious day but a very important Church Festival. The Alexander Nevsky Cathedral was packed to the doors for the Pentecostal Mass which lasted several hours.

The ceremonial was so impressive that even though one stood for over two hours it seemed only half the time. One young cantor sang with such freedom and sincerity that it was not difficult to imagine he was inspired by the same Power that once descended on the heads of the Apostles.

Early the next morning we set off in a military car to visit the monastery of Sveta Tröitza.

As its name implies, the monastery church is a shrine in honour of the Holy Cross, and on Whit Monday thousands of pious Bulgars walk or ride to the spot and pray for a special protection from illness and disease during the coming year. I did not go as a tourist to see the crowds and the church, but simply as a pilgrim, in the hope of perhaps losing the pestilential fever that appeared to have no remedy.

After a long and very tortuous ride we reached the great wooded hill, where the church buildings

are completely hidden from view by thick beeches and oaks that grow in wild profusion. The service had been over some few minutes before we finally arrived, to find the whole churchyard and central courtyard filled with groups of families. They all seemed to know each other, and there was much handshaking, kissing and mutual congratulation. Baskets of food and carpets lay about in every direction, for the custom is to eat an alfresco meal in the vicinity of the churchyard. Several families were picnicking in the long grass that grew in the little churchyard, leaning their backs against the whitewashed walls, and spreading out tablecloths wherever there was a convenient tombstone.

The whole scene was so entrancing that I sat on a nearby bench and just stared and stared like a child at the pantomime. Raina and her son went into the church to ask the aged "pope"¹ for a special blessing.

Inside the church it was cool and curiously homely. Sprays of wild fuschia, honeysuckle and lilac decorated the windowsills. Mixed with the clouds of incense that still hung in the air they gave the place a somewhat exotic smell. While I stood in the church looking round at the mural decorations, a constant stream of pilgrims went quietly up to the icons that were exposed on high desks by the iconstasis.

For a halfpenny I bought three thin wisps of tallow—one could not really call them candles—

¹ "Pope" is the mode of address used in several Balkan countries for a priest in Orders; it bears no reference whatever to the Bishop of Rome.

and lit them in honour of the miracle-working Sveta Tröitza. A nun sold them to me, and as I was just going to leave she smiled at me, and asked if I would not like to be anointed with the water from the Healing Springs. So with Raina standing by me to explain the ceremonial, the nun sang a two-verse prayer, and liberally wetted my head and neck with a bunch of flowers that she thrice dipped in a stoop of water. I was too fascinated by watching her face to take proper notice of the ritual's seriousness. One eye was completely missing¹ and the other one was screwed up very tightly, as she muttered fervent prayers for the good success of the venture. Afterwards we all shook hands and kissed each other, and I put ten leva in the Poor Box.

I discovered that although the surrounding buildings were called a monastery they were in actual fact inhabited not by monks but by half a dozen nuns. The attitude of the Orthodox Church with regard to women who lead the religious life is far more liberal than the Roman Church. One cannot help noticing that the women who live under the Orthodox Rule are freer, and have far more direct contact with the outside world than the Roman Nuns. Both in Bulgaria and Roumania I saw Sisters living in their own two-roomed houses, tending to the needs of the poor in much the same way as a District Visitor does in England, and they travel about quite alone when occasion demands a visit to some other part of the country.

¹ She had been half blinded by a drunken French soldier of the army of occupation.

DEAD PUPPETS DANCE

On that day at Sveta Tröitza the sisters were helping the pilgrims cook their lunch in the com-



ONE OF THE SISTERS.

munal kitchen, and the one-eyed nun who had anointed me insisted that for the cure to be quite

certain, I must drink a glass of the "light water." The light water was a natural mineral water, faintly effervescent, and tasting of iron filings and ink.

By the time we were ready to drive away, the clearing round the monastery was rapidly filling with sweet-stalls, cake-sellers with their ovens on flimsy tripods, lemonade vendors and innumerable carts, wagons, and traps that had brought pilgrims to the church.

We lunched at a wayside inn at Slivnitza, and then drove on to the little township of Aldomirovtzi where there was to be special dancing later in the afternoon. Aldomirovtzi is very near the frontier between Bulgaria and Yugoslavija, and not very far away runs the road to Dragoman and Nish, both ex-Bulgarian property. In January, 1937, the two countries signed a solemn agreement of friendship and concord, but I shall personally decline to believe in the worth or significance of such an action as long as the existing Yugoslav regulations actually deny to the Bulgars of this area the right to speak their own tongue.¹ Nor for that matter can I see how it can reasonably be expected that the two nations' enmity will cease so long as the fantastically unfair frontier arrangements are allowed to stand. From the conversation I had with a young army officer that afternoon, I believe that one day Bulgaria will demand a revision of the frontier.

The garrison band had been lent for the afternoon by the local commander-in-chief. In Bulgaria a

¹ Present regulations most rigidly prohibit the Bulgarian minorities from even speaking their mother tongue in their own houses!

man who cannot dance is regarded as rather a poor fish. The soldiers always enjoy providing the music for these great Festival dances, because they not only have the afternoon off but meet all their friends and relations in the town.

I went off to buy a pair of *tzérfulji* to dance in, because I was wearing great nailed shoes that were far too heavy for quick-moving footwork.

Never have I been so courteously and enthusiastically received than by the people of Aldomirovtzi. They took me by the arm and marched me off to the Kafana for a round of drinks—raw egg and brandy—and would not hear of my natural wish to pay for the shoes that had been bought for the dancing.

There was something absolutely magical about that dancing. The very atmosphere seemed charged with it. It was obvious from the start that this was the army's afternoon! A soldier with a hazel switch, decorated with wild campanulas, acted as Master of Ceremonies, and so controlled the excited crowd of dancers that I took some excellent shots of the giant Khoro, when three hundred people linked hands and danced in one vast circle.

As the afternoon wore on a rival orchestra of gipsies started another group of dancers just outside the school yard, and my attention was divided between racing about taking note of the two lots of dancers and trying not to miss learning any new steps that I had not previously seen. Needless to say the rival band attracted all the rowdier spirits, and it was not long before the soldiers' orchestral efforts were being wasted on a mere handful of

dancers. But they were not in the least offended at the apparent lack of support. It was a broiling hot day, so they used this temporary respite to put away some pints of brandy.

I went off to watch the dancers who were patronising the gipsy orchestra. They were moving round at a terrific speed, packed so tightly together that the men and women looked as though they were soldered together. For forty minutes, without a single pause, that human chain pranced and jigged its way over the dusty, broken ground. Oblivious of hunger or fatigue, they were lost in their intense concentration on the rhythmic patterns and syn-copations of the dance.

Too soon came the moment when we reluctantly started on our long drive back to Sophia. Hundreds of people surged round the car, shouting blessings and good wishes as we moved away, and left them to dance on right through the night.

Flat undulating fields on either side of the road stretched out for miles until they merged into the blue and purple hills of the horizon. In the evening light our road looked like a fine golden line cutting the great expanse of colour. Along this very road, when I was a child, the Bulgarian armies had marched on the then insignificant state of Serbia. How soon would it be before some accursed Power precipitated another war? Perhaps by next Whitsun the very soldiers with whom we had danced would march again on the long white road to Dragoman, and there would be no Fair next year at Aldomirovtzi.

An hour and a half later the petrol ran short, and



THE PATRIARCH STEPHEN, HEAD OF THE BULGARIAN CHURCH.

"THERE WAS SOMETHING ABSOLUTELY MAGICAL ABOUT THAT DANCING."



the chauffeur made us all get out to enable him to get at the extra cans secreted under the back seats. The place where we stopped was a fairyland of flowers growing in the long rank grass. Flowers I had never seen before in my life, and others that only grow in English gardens—campanulas, hyacinths, blue iris and pale-yellow orchids. Sitting under a stunted oak were two soldiers. They were walking back to their barracks outside Sophia, and hailed us to ask the time. I offered them a lift back, for there was just room at a pinch. So we all picked bunches of flowers, including the chauffeur, who was quite delighted to break the journey.

I watched those men laughing and racing about in the grass like children. It was more fantastic than all the last few months' experience rolled into one moment. Soldiers picking flowers by the roadside, forgetting for one slender moment their guns and their bayonets.

Such things only happen in this part of the world, where like dead puppets the nations dance out the enigma of their lives. He who would know the riddle must dance with them.

Gruaja dyzét
Thotë jo vërtét
Nuk jam aq
Po yam më pak;
Vërtét thotë jam
Tridhiet s'i kam!



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